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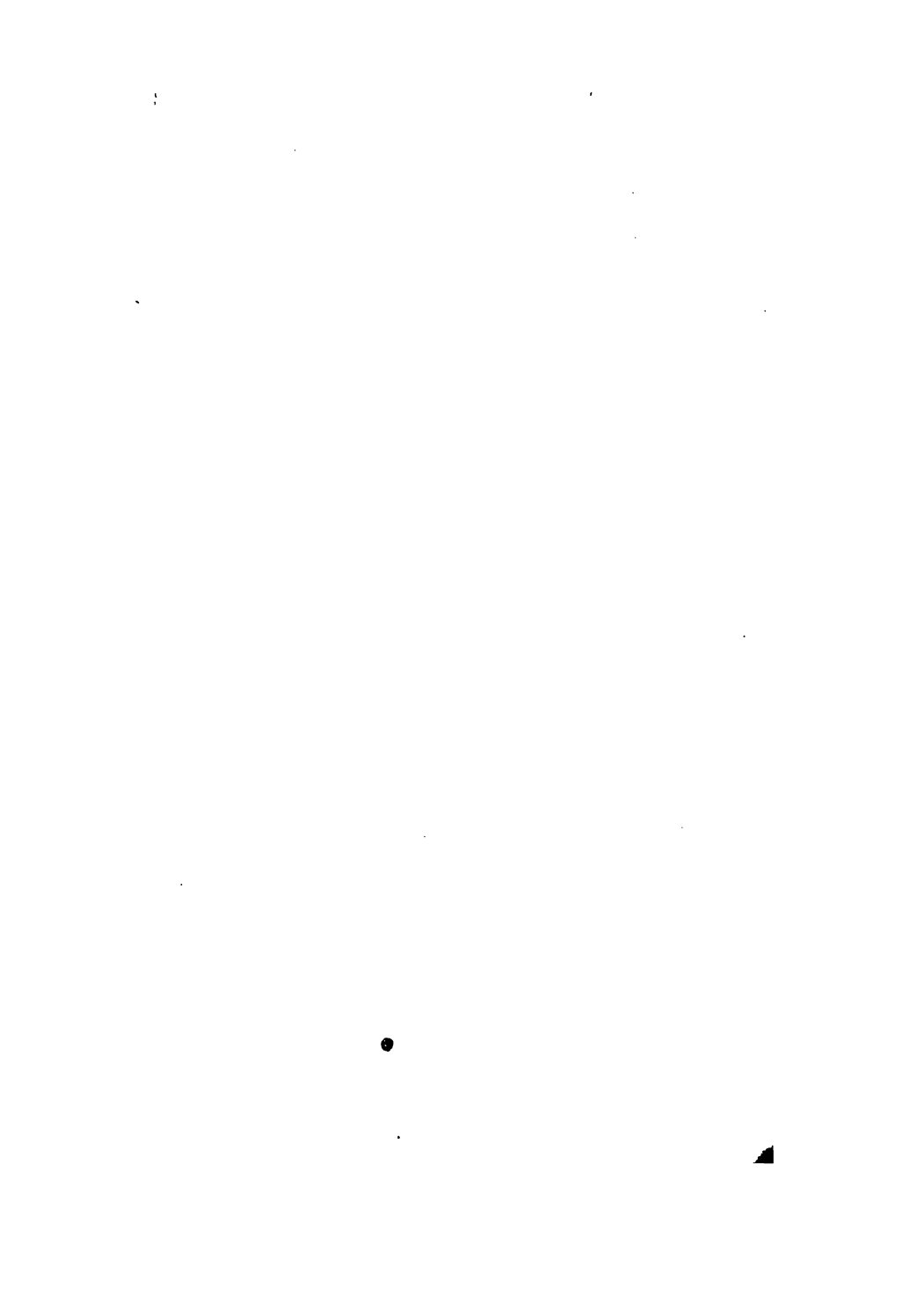
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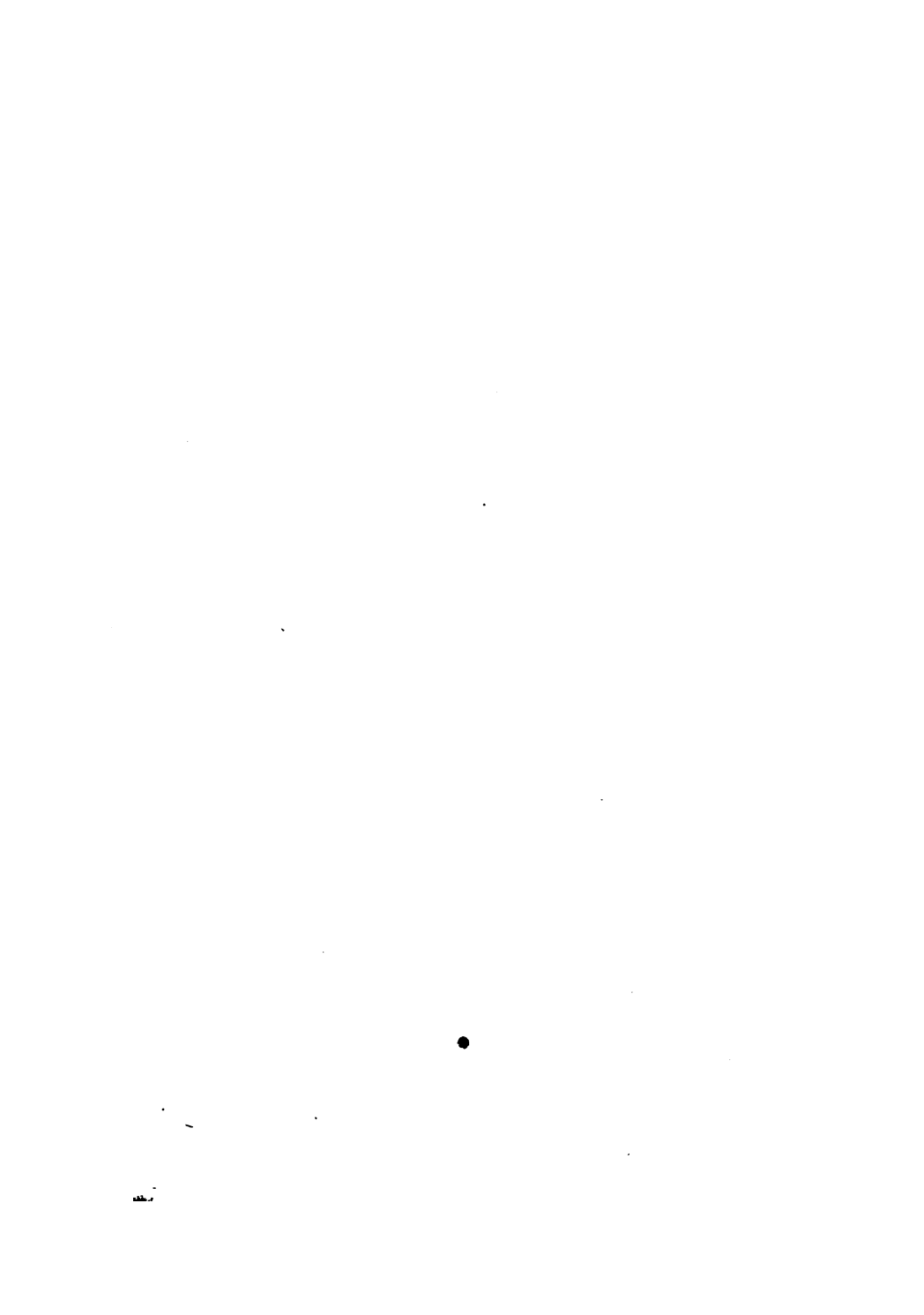
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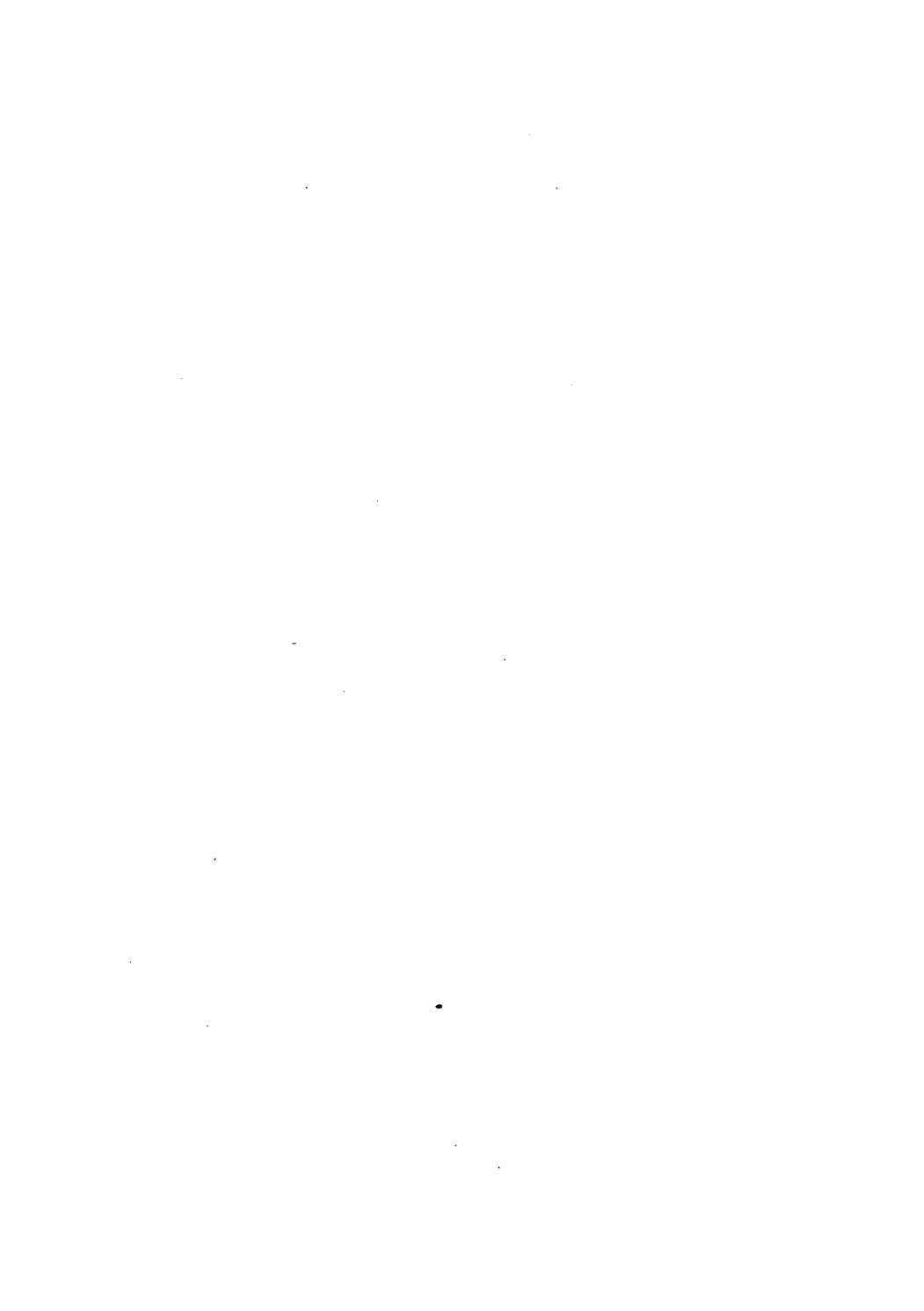
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**THE
TWENTY-SIX CLUES**

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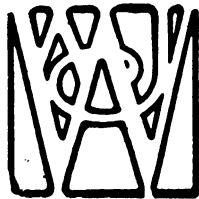
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THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES

BY
ISABEL OSTRANDER

AUTHOR OF
"THE CLUE IN THE AIR," "AT 1:30," ETC.



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(In collaboration with detective
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**THE
TWENTY-SIX CLUES**



THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES

CHAPTER I

IN THE CRIME MUSEUM

“**T**HE one thing you psychometric enthusiasts overlook in claiming perfection for your method of solving crime is the human equation. Your machines for recording the emotions of the suspect cannot lie, it is true, but neither can they tell the truth. Granted that they are perfect in themselves, they are operated by the most faulty machine created since the beginning of time—the human being. You, Mr. Terhune, are unquestionably the greatest living master of scientific criminal investigation, but do the purely mechanical implements of your trade invariably probe to the very soul of the crime?”

Five men of oddly assorted types were seated about a round table drawn up closely before the fireplace at one end of the spacious dining-room with coffee and liqueurs before them. The speaker, evidently the host, was small and elderly, with bushy gray hair and a pointed Vandyke beard which wagged excitedly when he talked yet lent an air of distinction to his dapper evening garb. His eyes beamed in eager, ingenuous interest through their heavy tortoise-rimmed glasses, but the lean, ascetic individual across the table whom he had addressed smiled austere and lifted supercilious brows as he replied:

"My dear Mr. Norwood, we do not rely only on what you designate the mechanical implements of our trade; we are fully aware of a : prepared to cope with such subjective phenomena as hysteria, defective mentality, falsehood, suggestion and self-deception. That is where the human equation proves of value. The mechanical implement is supplemented by the trained, analytical mind."

Mr. Calvin Norwood nodded.

"But that brings us again to the faulty human machine," he remarked slyly. "Is the investigator himself proof against at least two forms of the subjective phenomena you mention: suggestion and self-deception? A preconceived theory—"

"We do not deal in theories." Wade Terhune interrupted with a trace of asperity. "We work on a basis of proof, not opinion; proof obtained by tapping all the resources of modern science. Toxicology, bacteriology, chemistry, mineralogy, physics, chirography, microscopy, all aid us in the solution of crime. The expert criminalist must be a profound and almost universal student before he can hope to succeed."

"And what is your method, Mr. McCarty?" The host turned to a stocky, broad-shouldered man at his left. "You achieved success in more than one intricate case while you were connected with the police force of the city to say nothing of your work last year in the Rowntree-Collins affair. The investigation of crime has been my hobby for more than twenty years and I follow the records of the department faithfully. What is your *modus operandi*?"

"My what, sir?" inquired ex-Roundsman Timothy McCarty carefully. "You might not think it, but I would have lit on the truth a good deal earlier in that Rowntree case if I'd known what the Coroner was getting at when he sprung that 'corpus delicti' thing on us at the inquest."

Calvin Norwood took the hint.

"I mean, what is your procedure in starting an investigation?" he hastened to explain. "How do you go about it?"

McCarty stroked the immaculate chin beneath his stubby, sandy mustache reflectively.

"I don't know, sir," he responded in all sincerity. "I've no science like Mr. Terhune, only the wits I was born with. I just take the facts that's as plain as the nose on your face and fit them together. You see, Mr. Norwood, I had my training in the old days when it meant promotion if you got the guilty party, or a quick transfer to some backwoods precinct if you didn't. When anything stumped me I'd talk it over with my old friend here, Denny Riordan, and many a pointer I've got from him, though it's little he knew it himself, half the time!"

The long-limbed, lantern-jawed gentleman beside him stirred resentfully and his host smiled.

"I know of Mr. Riordan's co-operation with you," he said. "When I read the narrative which gave the inside facts of the Rowntree case I was anxious to meet you and talk it over with you; that is why I persuaded Mr. Terhune to bring you both here to dine with me to-night. Mr. Riordan, how do you analyze a case?"

"I don't!" protested Dennis Riordan hurriedly. "I'm a city fireman, not a detective, Mr. Norwood. However, being Mac's pal I'm let in for most that he's got on his mind. Before his uncle died and left him a landed proprietor so that he quit the force, there wasn't much came up in the department that we didn't discuss and scrap over and settle to suit ourselves. When he was on a case I'd just trail along with him to see what would happen."

"Interesting, Victor, eh!" Norwood turned to the fifth man, who had made no move to join in the conversation.

He was slim and dark, with a delicate, sensitive face

which bore the scars of a skillfully healed wound. Obviously in his twenties, he held himself with an erect military air, the bit of ribbon in the lapel of his dinner jacket and cross with two palms below it which he was destined never to behold attesting to the gallantry that had cost him his sight.

He bowed slightly and smiled as his soft, blind, brown eyes turned instinctively in the direction from which he had been addressed.

"Most interesting, Monsieur Norwood," he responded. "A d'Artagnan of the gendarmerie, is it not so? I have much desire to learn more of the little machines of Monsieur Terhune, however. To me it is quite incomprehensible, this recording of the emotions automatically; it would appear a miracle."

Terhune unbent and his quick smile lost all trace of patronage.

"It will be a privilege, my dear Captain Marchal, to give you a practical demonstration," he announced. "I will arrange to have you present at the next scientific experiment upon which I may be engaged, that you may note the effectiveness of my method. I can promise you that you will be astounded at the reactions displayed. But our host has made a collection of souvenirs which interests me profoundly. Are we to be favored this evening by a sort of private view, Mr. Norwood?"

"I should scarcely call them 'souvenirs'!" retorted his host with a shade of injured dignity. "In my crime museum I have assembled relics which have formed important data on many strange cases, solved and unsolved, as well as objects that have played significant parts in moments when history was made. I have been a mere dabbler, a dilettante in criminal investigation but occasionally a real find has come my way which at the time when inquiry was rife would have been of inestimable value to the authorities but which they

themselves failed to unearth. For instance, within the last few days a worn black wallet has come into my possession which contains the only tangible clue to a mystery which aroused and baffled the city ten years ago. I tell you this in confidence, gentlemen, for I mean to work upon its evidence myself before turning it over to the police; they have resented my suggestions in the past and refused my offers of co-operation on more than one occasion. I feel perfectly justified in withholding this from them for the present in view of the length of time that has elapsed since their investigation of the case was dropped."

"What mystery was that, sir?" asked McCarty, his embarrassment at the unaccustomed grandeur of his surroundings wholly forgotten in his interest. "I don't call to mind any case that wasn't finished about that time, and I was on the force then."

"The Hoyos case, Mr. McCarty."

"Think of that, now!" Dennis, too, broke through the bonds of self-consciousness which had held his abashed tongue in leash. "You remember it, Mac! That Dago who was lost off his yacht in the Hudson? 'Twas when you were laid up after Nick the Wop knifed you! You said yourself it was no suicide at the time, though the Chief let it go at that."

"I recall it," McCarty responded. "And so you've fresh evidence, sir? I'd like nothing better than a peep at your museum."

"Come then," Calvin Norwood rose. "I'll show you some interesting things."

"If you will excuse me." The young Frenchman spoke hesitatingly in a lowered tone. "I—there are some letters which I can finish typing, Monsieur Norwood, and you will perhaps not require my presence——"

"Oh, let the letters go, Victor." The older man inter-

rupted with kindly solicitude. "You have not been like yourself this evening, and we can't have you moping off all alone too much, my boy. Besides, I may need you to check me up on some of my data. You can have no idea, gentlemen, what a valuable assistant Captain Marchal has already proved himself. My museum is as sacred to me as a gallery of Old Masters would be to an art connoisseur, and my young friend here has developed a positive flair for the work."

Victor Marchal flushed darkly at the praise.

"I find it most interesting, this study of crime in the abstract," he repeated. "It was to me a pleasure to catalogue the contents of this unique museum."

Nevertheless, he hung back with evident reluctance when the others prepared to follow their host and McCarty watching his sensitive face noted the shade of repugnance which passed across it and did not marvel. To a young man fresh from the carnage of war and all but prostrated beneath the shock of the irreparable blow which it had dealt to him, a more cheerful atmosphere could well be imagined than the morbid horrors of a crime museum, but after his first momentary hesitation he resigned himself in suave compliance to his patron's suggestion.

The Norwood residence was an imposing if somewhat old-fashioned structure of brownstone situated near the Park in the most aristocratic section of the city, its center hall flanked by drawing-room and music-room on one side, library and dining-room on the other while at the rear a square, flat-roofed single-storied wing had been added which occupied almost half of the ample back-yard space, with a narrow strip of garden on either side.

It was toward this wing that the elated host marshaled his guests, chattering volubly the while with the naïve delight of an enthusiast sure of a congenial audience.

"You will see, gentlemen, the actual operating table

upon which the mad surgeon Valparesse committed so many murders before his mania was discovered. Upon it, beneath the blanket which covered Madero's body immediately after his assassination, lies the skeleton of the once beautiful Duchess of Piatra, the instigator and herself the victim of the famous Bucharest poisonings a generation ago."

Dennis Riordan clutched the arm of his friend McCarty with a muttered exclamation, but the latter shook him off in scorn and pressed forward lest a word of Norwood's discourse be lost to his avid ears.

"I have relics to show you of less celebrated but quite as interesting crimes." The sprightly, little, elderly gentleman continued with ghoulish relish. "For instance, the pocketknife which after five years convicted that Yonkers factory superintendent, Arnold, of the murder of his employer; also the knotted rope which proved that Ogilvy, the eccentric Scotch millionaire, was hanged and did not commit suicide, and the bottle of supposed headache cure—but you shall see for yourselves!"

They had reached the end of the corridor and Norwood with a flourish threw open the door leading to the wing and pressing an electric-light switch stepped aside that the others might precede him. They beheld a square, spacious, high-ceilinged room with a huge fireplace in the center of the left wall, tall windows at the farther end and long shelves and rows of cases filled with an incongruous and bewildering miscellany of objects familiar and bizarre.

In the center of the room directly beneath the great dome of light stood a long table upon which was suggestively outlined a figure beneath the gayly colored, sinisterly stained Mexican blanket, and on all sides ordinary firearms were mingled with strange knives and weapons, bits of fabric, fragments of furniture, medieval parchments, modern documents and hermetically sealed glass jars containing relics

of a more gruesome nature which combined to form the oddest conglomeration that had ever met their marveling gaze.

With an exclamation of keen, professional interest Wade Terhune advanced and McCarty followed gazing about him in awed wonderment. Dennis Riordan hung doggedly at his heels and the secretary, Marchal, brought up the rear with Norwood's guiding hand upon his arm.

"Ah! This, I take it, is your collection of footprint molds, of which you told me the other day." Terhune had paused at the first flat, glass-topped case. "Your theory regarding them was inconclusive but highly ingenious, I remember. I congratulate you, Mr. Norwood; you have indeed a most complete aggregation of specimens——"

"That is only the beginning." His gratified host drew him to a second case and McCarty turned aside to a shelf upon which a certain glass jar had caught his eye.

Discovering that it contained a neatly severed human ear he was hurriedly replacing it, when a smothered exclamation from Dennis Riordan summoned him.

The lanky fireman, awkward enough in his civilian clothes, had been drawn as by a magnet to the bright-hued blanket covering the skeleton upon the table and as his friend approached he muttered darkly:

"Mac, would you believe it? 'Twas this very rag they covered Madero with, after the murdering devils had riddled him with bullets! By the powers, I'm not a believer in ghosts but this is not the room I'd choose to spend a night in by myself! I don't wonder that blind young Frenchman would rather juggle his typewriter than take a chance of running up against one of these relics unbeknownst!"

"Whist, he'll hear you!" McCarty cautioned. "He's standing over by the fireplace. Come on and look at something more cheerful; there's a pickled ear over yonder——"

"I want none of it!" Dennis announced with a shudder. "I've heard of grown men running like mad after butterflies and spending their last nickel for canceled stamps and such, but it's a strange and unholy taste that would lead to a collection of this sort! Still, I would like one peep at the bones of the Duchess Who's-this, under the blanket. From the bulk of it, Madero himself might be lying beneath it."

"I've no doubt Mr. Norwood will show it to you, after. Come on, now, and listen to him!" McCarty urged. "What's that he's taking out of the case?"

"—Singular indeed!" Wade Terhune's comment carried distinctly to their ears in grudging admiration. "Poisoned court-plaster! I confess I never should have thought of so simple a method of introducing deadly toxin directly into the blood."

"It found an innocent victim." Calvin Norwood closed the glass lid. "You may recall the inexplicable death of the little Thorndike heiress, after a slight fall which merely grazed her knee? The matter was hushed up for family reasons and this bit of plaster came into my possession in a confidential manner, but I have a very definite idea as to the murderer's identity and for whom he really intended its use. However, I want to show you the Hoyos wallet, of which I spoke before we came in here. It contains some letters which throw an entirely new light— Ah, Mr. Riordan! You are interested in the Madero blanket?"

He had turned to cross the room and encountered Dennis, who still lingered as if fascinated at the head of the long table.

"In what's under it, sir," Dennis responded. "The bones of this Duchess you told us about. Did she have any hair left now, I wonder?"

He spoke with elaborate carelessness, but McCarty, who

had turned also from his place at Norwood's elbow, eyed him sharply and then took a quick step toward him.

"Hair?" repeated the amateur criminologist with an indulgent smile. "In life the Duchess of Piatra had very beautiful red hair and a few strands of it cling still to the skull. Would you care to see it?"

"Red hair, you say, sir? And it couldn't change after?" There was a note of suppressed excitement in Dennis' voice now which drew even Wade Terhune's attention, and the young Frenchman, too, awoke from his reverie and approached. Dennis' rugged face had paled slightly and his gray eyes glinted. "Mr. Norwood, I would like nothing better than to see what is here!"

Still smiling, their host advanced to the side of the table.

"The Duchess of Piatra," he began in his most didactic manner, "was accredited the most beautiful woman in the Balkans twenty years ago. During the last of the petty wars before the great world-struggle her tomb was rifled and I managed, after much diplomatic bartering, to obtain the skeleton. The nature of the poison which killed her has never been discovered, but it had a curious effect upon the bones, as you may see——"

Norwood lifted a corner of the blanket and with one jerk swept it to the floor. The next instant he had leaped back, his face gray and eyes fairly protruding from their sockets while a sound like a sharp, convulsive gasp emanated from the tense group about him.

Stretched upon the table lay no skeleton but the rounded life-like form of a young woman in all the opulent curves of budding maturity. One arm was crumpled beneath her, the other lay carelessly across the breast of her dark silk gown and her masses of disheveled, jet-black hair rippled over the edge of the table. It would seem almost that she slept until her face was seen and then the distorted swollen

features, the staring eyes and blackened, protruding tongue revealed the hideous truth no less surely than the blue scarf which had been knotted so ruthlessly about her slender throat as to seem almost embedded in the flesh.

"My God! What is this!" Norwood croaked at last.

Terhune stood as if petrified, but Dennis rocked upon his heels.

"Holy Mother!" he ejaculated. "Is it the Duchess herself come to life a corpse again, or is it——?"

"It's murder!" McCarty announced in an awestruck tone, as he touched the face of the dead woman. "The woman's been strangled within the hour! Who is she?"

"Murder?" Victor Marchal elbowed him aside and groping wildly for the table, bent above it. He had scarcely touched it, however, when he straightened and cowered back.

"That perfume!" His cry rang through the room. "That scent of the Rose d'Amour! It is she! Madame Jarvis!"

"Evelyn? God, can it be?" Calvin Norwood gasped in a raucous whisper as his shuddering gaze swept the still form before him. "It—it is! Who can have done this fearful thing!"

"Murder, is it?" Dennis' voice expressed a certain revived confidence now that he was assured the materialization before them, tragic as it was, had not been induced by some dread supernatural agency. He turned to McCarty in swift challenge: "Now, you Irish son-of-a-gun, solve that!"

CHAPTER II

TWO STRANDS OF BLACK HAIR

BUT is it true that she is really dead?" The blind secretary's emotional voice rose in an almost hysterical appeal and his fingers hovered tremblingly over the body. "What is it that has killed her? A-ah! This scarf which is drawn about her throat! Un-loose it, Messieurs, I beg of you! It may be that life still lingers; that there is yet time!"

"'Tis useless, sir," McCarty interrupted him. "She's already cold, and the body must not be disturbed until the police come."

At the mention of the authorities who were sometimes his allies, more frequently his adversaries but always his competitors, Wade Terhune bestirred himself to action and took swift command of affairs. Fixing his erstwhile host with the cold eye of an inquisitor he asked in a curt, peremptory tone.

"Who is Evelyn Jarvis?"

"She is my niece Joan's intimate friend," Norwood responded mechanically as he moistened his dry lips. The jaunty air of self-possession had fallen from him and he appeared all at once shrunken and aged. "Oliver Jarvis' wife and our near neighbor. God! How can we tell him!"

"You positively identify the body, then, Mr. Norwood?" Terhune went on steadily.

"It cannot be! I feel as if I must have gone mad!" The other passed a shaking hand across his brow. "I can

scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes and yet—her eyes, her hair, that emerald upon her finger—oh! It is Evelyn! Poor child! Poor child!”

“You say they are neighbors of yours?” Terhune began and turned swiftly at a movement behind him. “Where are you going, McCarty?”

“To telephone Police Headquarters.” The ex-Roundsman responded with a firmness which matched the criminalist’s dominant tones. “There’s been murder done and the body’s here, Mr. Terhune. It’s up to them first of all.”

Terhune bit his lip and a slight color flushed his lean face, but he capitulated with an ironic smile.

“Assuredly, my dear McCarty. Summon them by all means! I merely wished to make a preliminary investigation before their well-meant efforts obliterated any possible clues.” As the other disappeared in the corridor, he turned once more to Calvin Norwood. “Where do the Olivers live?”

“On the next street south directly on a line with this house; their back-yard and ours are separated only by a fence in which we have had a door cut through, for the girls—Evelyn and my Joan—have been like sisters. Why should anyone have taken her life, and how—how did she get here?”

Terhune did not reply immediately. He had bent over the table in his turn and was examining the body with deft, sure touches. Dennis Riordan stepped aside deferentially, and Victor Marchal had retreated to the cold hearth once more and stood with his elbow upon the mantel and his face averted.

“We must send for Oliver, of course.” Norwood’s dazed, trembling voice rambled on. “I can’t tell the boy, I can’t! It will kill him! He worshiped her——”

“Dead at least four or five hours.” Terhune audibly made note of the result of his conclusions as he glanced at his

wrist watch. "A quarter of ten; the murder was committed, then, approximately between five and six. There was a violent struggle; her hands are bruised and one sleeve of her gown is torn as you can see, but that is merely superficial. The knot in which the scarf is tied is the significant point. When did you last see Mrs. Jarvis alive?"

"The day before yesterday, on Wednesday evening. They gave an informal farewell dinner; she and Oliver are sailing for France next week—were to have sailed, I mean——" He paused and with an obvious effort pulled himself together, adding: "Mr. Terhune, I appreciate your interest in this terrible affair from a purely professional standpoint but really I cannot discuss it further until Oliver has been summoned."

"He's coming." McCarty's voice announced from the doorway as he re-entered. "After I talked to Inspector Druet, I looked up the Jarvis' number in the 'phone book and called their house. Some man, the butler, I've no doubt, told me nobody was at home but Mr. Jarvis might be at his club, the Gotham. I got to him there."

"What did you tell him?" quavered Norwood.

The secretary, too, had come forward once more.

"Just that you must see him here immediately, sir. 'Twas no concern of mine, but the Inspector will be asking for him, anyway. And, Mr. Norwood, sir, I think if you'd just say a word to the servants—the butler heard me at the telephone talking to Headquarters and I'm afraid we'll have them about our ears——"

"I—I must speak to them, of course!" Norwood turned to the door. "This is horrible! What am I to say to Oliver!"

He hurried from the room and Victor Marchal started to follow, then paused and stooping, fumbled for the Mexican blanket.

"You will permit, Messieurs?" he asked quietly. "Until

the police officials arrive, at least, it is but respect to the dead.”

Reverentially he spread the blanket over the pitiful, still form upon the table, then turning with outstretched, groping hands he made his way from the room.

Terhune had taken himself to the farther end of the museum where the four long French windows, set so closely as to give the effect of a wall of glass, looked out upon the back-yard and McCarty and Dennis stood gazing round-eyed at each other.

“I knew it!” the latter ejaculated at last in a lowered tone. “From the first minute I set foot in this room I knew there was something wrong with it more than the heathenish collection would account for. No more could I keep my eyes off that table——”

“Whatever put it into your head to ask that question of Mr. Norwood about the hair, Denny?” McCarty demanded.

“Well, I saw a skeleton in a real museum once, and it was not what you might call corpulent,” Dennis averred. “Likewise, it was as bald as the palm of your hand. Now, that blanket looked too bulky to be covering just a rack of bones and when I walked around the head of the table I saw a long, black lock of hair hanging down nearly to the floor. I didn’t know what to think, Mac, except that there was something going on here beyond a healthy mortal mind to figure out. What do you make of it?”

McCarty walked to the end of the table and glanced down. From beneath the gaudy blanket there rippled a single strand of silky ebony hair.

“Well, McCarty, what is your opinion?” Terhune had approached and unconsciously echoed Dennis’ inquiry. “Have you formed one yet?”

There was about him an air of conscious superiority which betokened a discovery and the other eyed him warily.

"I have not, Mr. Terhune," he responded. "I've nothing yet to go upon. This is the first time in my experience that a murder has been committed and the body brought and laid out where it would be the most handy to come to the notice of Mr. Norwood, as if the murderer was mocking him and daring him to find out the truth. Of all places in the world you'd expect to come on a fresh-killed corpse, it would not be in a museum of old crime relics!"

"Mr. Norwood is merely an eccentric amateur." Terhune shrugged. "The remarkable phase of the affair is that it should have occurred to-night, of all occasions, when I was present; and you, too, McCarty, for your work on the force in the old days and in association with me last year on the Rowntree case is not forgotten. If someone, knowing that we were to gather here to-night, had actually planned this ghastly surprise for us it could not have been more successfully consummated."

"It could not," McCarty agreed. "However, 'twas not to give us something to do that the poor lady was murdered! What do you think of it yourself, sir?"

The subdued but insistent peal of the front door-bell checked Terhune's reply and all three listened anxiously.

"What is it?" they heard a deep and pleasantly modulated masculine voice inquire. "What has happened, Uncle Cal? I came as quickly as a taxi would bring me."

Their elderly host's quavering tones responded in an indistinguishable murmur and there came a sharp exclamation from the other.

"Evelyn! An accident? What do you mean? Where is she?"

Calvin Norwood's voice rose in a broken cry.

"Oliver, oh, my boy! I can't tell you! She's there—there in my museum! May God help us all!"

Hasty steps strode down the corridor and a tall, young

man appeared in the doorway. He was in his early thirties, well-built and of a clean-cut Anglo-Saxon type but his smoothly shaven face was very white and his blue eyes swept widely about the room ignoring or unconscious in his alarmed state of the presence of the three strangers.

"Where is my wife?" he repeated hoarsely. "She is not here! What has happened to her?"

Wade Terhune stepped forward.

"Mr. Jarvis, we have terrible news for you. Your wife has been killed."

He spoke slowly and quietly and for a moment the younger man eyed him as though the purport of the words had not penetrated his consciousness. Then he staggered back.

"Killed!" It was a mere husky whisper. "Evelyn—killed!"

His eyes roved dazedly once more about the room and back to Terhune's face and leaping forward he seized him by the arm.

"You can't mean what you are saying!" he cried. "Speak, man! My wife——!"

"It is true, Mr. Jarvis. She is dead."

"But how? Where?" The other's voice broke in sheer agony of half-incredulous grief. "Take me to her!"

"You don't understand, Mr. Jarvis. Your wife's body was discovered here a few moments before you were summoned. You must try to command yourself, for I have something yet more shocking to tell you." Terhune's own voice was gravely sympathetic but his sharp eyes followed every expression of the stricken face before him. "Mrs. Jarvis' body was brought here and placed where it was found in this room. She had been killed, I told you; I should have said 'murdered'!"

"Murdered! You are mad! Who would murder Evelyn? Where is this body which you have found?"

No one answered him but unconsciously all eyes turned to the swathed form upon the table and he followed their gaze. With a gasp he sprang forward and tore off the enshrouding blanket and a cry rang through the room so poignant with horror and heart-breaking despair that the others instinctively averted their faces.

"My boy!" Calvin Norwood had entered and swiftly approached him. "Try to be brave and control yourself for her sake! We must find the vile wretch who——"

His voice ended in a choking gurgle for the grief-crazed young husband had turned and seized him by the throat.

"You've done this!" he roared. "You've killed her!"

Terhune moved swiftly, but McCarty and Dennis were before him and with a dexterous lunge forced Jarvis to relinquish his frenzied grasp.

"There now!" McCarty admonished soothingly. "'Tis a terrible business, Mr. Jarvis, but Mr. Norwood is not responsible. He knows no more of it than we do. We all came in here with him and found the body just as you see it now. We've no notion how it came here nor who killed her!"

A shudder shook the tense form which they held and it relaxed suddenly.

"Uncle Cal, I didn't mean—I didn't know what I was doing!" The young man murmured brokenly and turning once more to the table he fell upon his knees with his arms thrown out across the body of his wife and burst into harsh racking sobs.

At that moment the door-bell rang a second time and Inspector Druet's curt, incisive tones reached their ears in quick questioning. The butler's frightened stammer replied to him and then firm steps sounded in the corridor and the police official entered the room followed by two

sturdy figures who took up their positions on either side of the doorway.

The Inspector nodded to Terhune and McCarty and his keen, alert eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"Mr. Norwood?" He turned to the bowed, elderly figure. "I'm from Headquarters. I'd like to have you tell me what you know of this crime, but first who is that?"

He pointed to the grief-stricken man by the table and Norwood responded:

"Her husband. Mr. McCarty sent for him as soon as he had telephoned to you. Inspector, this is a frightful affair! The young woman was an intimate friend of my household and a near neighbor, but I have not seen her for two days. I don't know how she was murdered nor the body conveyed here. I only know that we came in a half-hour ago and found her as you see, only the blanket had been drawn up, completely covering her. We were in here for some minutes before we discovered the body——"

The Inspector stopped him with a gesture, for Oliver Jarvis had dragged himself to his feet and lurched toward them.

"The police?" he asked thickly. "Find me the man who killed my wife and you can have all I possess! Find him for me and let me deal with him! Evelyn! Evelyn!"

He swayed and collapsed utterly, slumping forward as McCarty caught him in his strong arms.

"He'll do no good here for awhile," the latter remarked. "He's fainted, I think. Shall we get him to another room, Inspector, till he comes to and quiets down a bit? He's near crazed, and no wonder!"

"Yes, Mac. Take him away, but come back yourself—no, Martin and Yost can take him."

The two figures by the door advanced at the Inspector's nod, and Norwood roused himself.

"The library would be best; the front room on your left as you entered the house. Victor Marchal, my secretary, is there and will attend to him."

As the unconscious form was borne away by the two stalwart detectives, the Inspector examined the body swiftly and then returned once more to his interrogation.

"When did you enter this room last, Mr. Norwood?"

"This afternoon; I think it was about three o'clock." The older man had regained a trifle of his composure with the removal of the bereaved husband, but his eyes flutteringly avoided the figure upon the table. "Everything was in perfect order then."

"The operating table was bare?"

"No, it is always covered with the Madero blanket beneath which I had placed the skeleton of the Duchess of Piatra!" Norwood paused with a start of returning memory which anticipated the Inspector's next query.

"Where is that skeleton now?"

"I—I don't know! The murderer must have hidden it somewhere or removed it altogether when he put the body there in its place. I hadn't remembered it until this moment." Norwood glanced about him as if expecting the gruesome object to meet his eye, but it was not in evidence and the room contained no closed receptacle large enough to conceal it. "You've heard of my collection of crime relics, Inspector,—"

The other interrupted him with a trace of impatience.

"Of course. But this afternoon, did you raise the blanket and look beneath it?"

"No. It is sometimes undisturbed for weeks together. I only took it from the table to-night to show my guests—Mr. Terhune, Mr. McCarty, and Mr. Riordan—the skeleton. This afternoon I entered for just a moment to obtain some notes for my secretary to transcribe, and went out

immediately thereafter, to visit my friend, Professor Parlowe, the eminent toxicologist. I found him in the midst of a highly interesting experiment in his laboratory and returned home barely in time to change for dinner."

"You were alone when you came in here for the notes this afternoon?"

"No. Victor—Captain Marchal—my secretary, was with me."

"He left the room with you?" persisted the official.

"Yes, but he returned later and replaced the notes." Norwood was evidently disturbed afresh at the trend of the questioning. "He has free access to the museum at all times, Inspector; most of his work for me is in the care and tabulating of my collection, you know. He carries one key and I the other."

"You keep your museum locked, then?"

"Of course. It is only on comparatively rare occasions that I throw it open to visitors." Norwood spoke with dignity. "My collection is not on display for the morbidly curious."

"The door was locked when you brought your guests here this evening?" The Inspector was not to be swerved from his point and Dennis stirred and glanced meaningly at McCarty.

"Why, no, I—I don't believe that it was." Norwood's eyes traveled from one to another of them in troubled bewilderment. "I was so deeply engrossed in talking of the various objects of interest which I intended to show my friends that I scarcely noted. Did you observe whether I used my key or not?"

He appealed to Terhune, but while the latter was considering his reply Dennis broke in irrepressibly.

"You did not, sir. You switched on the light and just turned the handle of the door."

"Dear me! This is most unusual." Norwood was plainly taken aback. "I must ask Victor if he forgot to lock the door."

"I will ask him myself, later," the Inspector announced drily. "Who else was in the house this afternoon during your absence?"

"Only the cook and housemaid, and they were below stairs. My niece is out of town on a visit and her personal maid is with her," explained Norwood. "We have reduced our household staff considerably as a matter of war economy and we keep no other servants except the butler. I gave him an afternoon off to-day to go to see his brother, who is ill in the hospital."

"H'm! I should like to have a little talk, then, with your secretary." Inspector Druet turned to the door. "He may have seen——"

"He can see nothing." Norwood interrupted. "He is a young French officer, recently blinded in battle, whom I brought back with me from France three months ago. He knows no more of this terrible event than I, and I beg that you will be as considerate with him as possible. His nerves were completely shattered by the ordeal through which he has passed and he is only beginning to regain his grip on life. Evelyn—Mrs. Jarvis—had taken a very kindly interest in him and the shock of her death, her murder, has utterly depressed and unnerved him. He was on the verge of absolute prostration when I left him in the library."

"I will let him off as lightly as I can, Mr. Norwood," the Inspector promised with a note of deepened respect in his tones. "However, if the murder was not committed here someone in this house must know how the woman's body was conveyed to this room——"

"If you will pardon my intrusion, Inspector," Terhune's tones were ironically apologetic. "I may be able to save

you some valuable time. Mrs. Jarvis was not killed on the premises, nor was her body carried through the house. Someone, presumably her murderer, brought it in through that window there, the second from the left as you face it. I do not as a rule express an opinion on mere theory but I am led to believe that the murder occurred in her own home."

"Is that so, Mr. Terhune?" The Inspector paused deferentially. "On what do you base that opinion?"

"I have already ascertained from Mr. Norwood that the Jarvis residence is directly on a line with this, facing the next street south and the two back-yards are separated only by a wall through which a door has been cut." Terhune's tenuous fingers sought the pocket of his vest. "Just before your arrival I examined the four windows in the rear of the room carefully. All were closed as you see them now, but the second from the left was unbolted and I opened it experimentally. Caught in a loose sliver of wood on the inner side of the frame, a little over four feet from the floor, where the two perpendicular sides of the window open like double doors I found—this."

He stretched out his hand and Dennis and McCarty glanced once more significantly at each other. From between the thumb and forefinger dangled a long, curling strand of glossy, jet-black hair.

CHAPTER III

MARGOT

FOR a moment they stared and then Calvin Norwood gasped:

“But it seems incredible! That window is ten feet or more from the ground and there is only an open space beneath this end of the extension, for the kitchen although built out also does not reach the length of the museum. There is no way in which a person could climb up here, to say nothing of one burdened with the weight of a dead body.”

“If you will glance out of the window you will see how easily that difficulty was overcome,” interrupted Terhune. “A short ladder has been placed against the house, its upper end resting upon the ledge of the window.”

“The ladder!” Norwood exclaimed. “I never thought of that! It is used for preening the vines which run over the yard fence and is usually lying around somewhere at hand, but it did not occur to me that anyone would ever employ it as a means of gaining ingress here!”

A rapid but fairly comprehensive search of the museum disclosed no further clues nor traces of the assailant's presence and Inspector Druet went to the telephone to summon the Chief Medical Examiner and notify the Homicide Bureau.

McCarty, with Dennis in tow, trailed him wistfully into the hall.

"I'll be taking myself off now, Inspector," he remarked. "You've the case in hand, to say nothing of an expert like Mr. Terhune right on the job to help you and Mr. Norwood himself."

"Between you and me, Mac," the Inspector interrupted confidentially, "old Norwood is a plain nut. He has been the pest of the department for the last twenty years, dabbling and interfering in every case that has come up, offering advice and getting under foot generally. You know how we've always been bothered with amateur Sherlock Holmeses, but he is the worst crank of the lot and the fact that he has never yet gotten the slightest result in an investigation doesn't discourage him a little bit. As for Mr. Terhune, he is a great man in his line, but he is not officially on this case, you know, he only stumbled on it, just as you did, and Riordan. Why don't you stay and see the preliminary examination through at least? It looks to me as if it were going to be one of the biggest things we've tackled in years and I'd like to have you on the job in an unofficial capacity."

"I wouldn't ask anything better!" McCarty beamed. "I telephoned to you over the head of the Lieutenant of the precinct because I thought likely the District Attorney would put you on the case anyway, sir, and you would want to be in on the ground floor. It's the devil and all how I came to fall into this, now that I'm off the force, but I'd hate to quit it cold; I've never seen the beat of it in all my experience."

The Inspector concluded his telephonic communications and then, locking the museum door with the owner's key which he had procured from him, led the way to the library, whither the host and Wade Terhune had preceded them. They found Victor Marchal in his accustomed attitude before the fireplace, his sightless eyes fixed as if intro-

spectively upon the empty hearth. He was pale but composed and there was no trace of the prostration of which Norwood had spoken.

The latter was seated on the couch with his arm about the bowed shoulders of Oliver Jarvis, and Terhune stood before them.

"I can't understand it!" The young husband's tone was monotonous and dulled with despair. "It's like a hideous, insane nightmare! I feel that every moment Evelyn may come and wake me from it and then I see her poor face with that frightful knotted thing about her throat——"

He broke off, shuddering, and Norwood patted him in fatherly fashion.

"We must try not to think of that now," he admonished. "We have stern work ahead of us, Oliver——"

"Do you think I'm forgetting?" Jarvis sprang to his feet. "Do you think I mean to waste my time in weak repining now, Uncle Cal, when my poor darling has been done to death and the creature who could do so monstrous a thing still breathes God's air? All that I want, all that is left to me, is to find him and make him suffer! Mr. Terhune, they say that you are the greatest criminal investigator in the world to-day; that you have never lost a case——"

"I do not claim to be infallible, Mr. Jarvis," interrupted the detective, modestly.

"Nevertheless, your work is celebrated; you have an international reputation and surely you can find the murderer of my poor wife! Use every effort, Mr. Terhune. Spare no expense! I am accounted rich as men compute such things in these days and I would cheerfully, eagerly, give everything I possess to avenge her! That is all that

matters to me now; I have nothing else to live for and I shall not rest until it is accomplished!"

"You mean that you wish to engage me to investigate the case for you, Mr. Jarvis?" Terhune's eyes glinted with enthusiasm.

"I do. I place myself unreservedly in your hands." The younger man turned to the official. "Please don't misunderstand, Inspector. I have no lack of confidence in your ability or that of the authorities, but I want to leave no possible stone unturned to find the assassin."

"We are always glad to work with Mr. Terhune." Inspector Druet bowed slightly. "In fact, we have ourselves called upon him on more than one occasion to give us the aid of his specialized knowledge. Have you an idea of any possible motive for the crime, Mr. Jarvis?"

"None! It seems like the act of a madman! Evelyn had no enemies, no secrets; her life was like an open book and everyone who came in contact with her loved her." He broke off with a groan. "No one could have had a sane motive for taking her life!"

"How long have you been married?"

"Five years. My wife was an orphan of French descent, resident in New Orleans with her guardian. I met her the winter before our marriage, when I went down for the Mardi Gras." Jarvis was evidently bracing himself to meet the ordeal of questioning and the Inspector's stone was considerably gentle.

"What was Mrs. Jarvis's maiden name?"

"Evelyn Beudet. She was an only child and has no living relatives."

"This guardian of whom you speak; who is he?"

"Pierre Chartrand; he died about two years ago. He was a banker and life-long friend of her father; an eccentric

old gentleman but he worshiped Evelyn and made her his sole heiress."

"You brought Mrs. Jarvis to New York immediately after your marriage?"

"Yes. Then we went to Europe but returned when the war broke out." He hesitated and added: "My wife had never been north until we were married and as we have not since visited New Orleans, her old friends have dropped completely away. Her life entered practically a new phase with our marriage and I know how and where every hour of it has been spent. Her friends and associates are mine and it is inconceivable that among them there could be one who desired her death, much less a friend who could have encompassed it in such wise! I tell you this hideous thing has come like a bolt from a clear sky!"

"When did you last see your wife alive, Mr. Jarvis?"

"At luncheon to-day—God! Could it have been only to-day? It seems years!—We were both busied with preparations for our departure, for we had planned to sail for France next week to engage in relief and reconstruction work and there were many final details to be arranged."

"You lunched at home? Who was present beside Mrs. Jarvis and yourself?"

"No one. Our household consists only of the servants."

"How many are there?"

"Four, besides the chauffeur; the butler, cook, housemaid, and my wife's personal maid. All the others have been discharged pending our departure."

"What do you know of them, Mr. Jarvis? Would you consider them trustworthy?" pursued the Inspector.

"Oh, absolutely. The butler, old Henry, was employed by my parents before I was born, and the cook, also, was in my mother's service; the housemaid is her niece and Margot, my wife's maid, is particularly devoted to her.

She was a Belgian refugee whom we brought back from Europe with us at the outbreak of the war. They are all unquestionably loyal, Inspector; I could take my oath on that."

"You left the house after luncheon, Mr. Jarvis?"

"Yes, immediately. I had an appointment at my attorney's office and a later one at the French consulate. I was delayed there until after seven o'clock."

"You did not dine at home?"

"No, I went directly to the club. Evelyn—" he paused and a startled expression swept his drawn face. "Why, Evelyn was to have dined alone at the house of old Mrs. Lyle Fremont. I wonder——?"

"We will look into that presently." Inspector Druet waived the implied suggestion. "What were your wife's plans for the afternoon?"

"She intended to shop and pay a farewell call or two; nothing of any vital importance, however; Mrs. Fremont, with whom she was to have dined, is an invalid and practically a recluse, but she and my mother were girls together and my wife was one of the few people she would still receive; she adored her. Inspector, when—how long do you think my wife——?"

He could not continue, but Inspector Druet nodded comprehendingly.

"We must wait for the arrival of the Chief Medical Examiner before we can positively determine that, Mr. Jarvis," he responded. "However, I think we may safely conclude that death took place in the afternoon, some little time before the dinner hour. When you took leave of your wife to-day did her manner seem quite as usual? You observed no depression nor apprehension?"

"On the contrary," replied Jarvis in a surprised tone. "She was never frivolous nor lightminded and she had en-

tered with very serious intent into our plans for aid in France, but to-day there was a gentle gayety about her, a sense of joyous anticipation in our projected journey and the work which lay before us——”

His voice ended in a dry, convulsive sob and once more he buried his face in his hands.

“I will ask you only one more question, Mr. Jarvis.” Inspector Druet’s voice lowered. “What was your wife’s costume at lunch? The same as when you viewed the body just now in the museum?”

A violent shudder swept again over the bowed figure.

“I don’t know—I saw only her face, as I shall see it before me until I die!” he exclaimed brokenly. “When I left her this afternoon she was dressed for her shopping expedition in a green tailored suit; I remember that distinctly, for she spoke of discarding it before we sailed next week.”

Dennis, who, with McCarty, had remained in the background, thrust out a bony elbow and nudged his friend significantly. The body lying in the museum had been clad in a plain gown of dark plum-colored silk with a low rolling collar and cuffs of soft white and the scarf so cruelly knotted about the slender throat was of navy blue.

McCarty shrugged impatiently at the unnecessary reminder and his eyes eagerly followed the Inspector, who had turned to the young Frenchman.

“Captain Marchal, you accompanied Mr. Norwood to the museum this afternoon, did you not?”

“Yes, Monsieur.” The secretary advanced with one guiding hand resting lightly upon the mantel. “There were some notes which Monsieur Norwood desired transcribed——”

“You left the museum with Mr. Norwood?”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

"Did you or he lock the door behind you?"

"Monsieur Norwood did, but I unlocked it later with the key which he has presented to me, when I went to replace the notes after transcribing them."

"Do you know what time that was, Captain Marchal?"

"Just after four. The clock upon the mantel here struck the hour as I was gathering together the notes to return them."

"The museum was empty then? Did you detect anything which would suggest the presence of an intruder?" Inspector Druet spoke carefully and the young man smiled a faint acknowledgment.

"Nothing, Monsieur. Since I do not see, my other senses are gradually becoming—how shall I say?—acute, and I am sure that I should have known of a living presence, but yet——"

He paused, and after a moment the Inspector suggested:

"'Yet'—what, Captain Marchal?"

"I—I did not know—nothing warned me, when we re-entered the museum an hour ago, of the presence of the dead." His voice had sunk to a mere whisper and he added hurriedly. "In spite of that I believe there was no one there this afternoon when I entered."

"Did you relock the door on leaving?"

"Yes, Monsieur; of that I can assure you. See! here is my key, which never leaves me." He produced a small, flat key of the Yale patent and held it out. "I returned here to the library and typed until Monsieur Norwood came home."

"What time was that?"

"I do not know to the moment, but it was after six."

"So that you were practically alone in the house from the time of his departure until the dinner-hour?"

"Except for the cook and the housemaid, Monsieur,

and they were below. The butler was out, but just before Monsieur Norwood returned I heard him moving about in the dining-room, arranging the table for dinner. Until then no slightest sound in the house had reached my ears." The young man spoke with deep earnestness. "The bell of the front door, even that of the telephone, was silent all the afternoon."

"Captain Marchal, when was the last time you—er, encountered Mrs. Jarvis alive?"

"Late on Tuesday afternoon. Madame Jarvis had called to see Monsieur Norwood, but he was engaged."

"You entered into conversation with her?"

The young man hesitated.

"Madame very graciously invited me to dine at her home the following evening, with Monsieur Norwood."

"You declined?" The question was terse.

"I am still awkward and gauche, Monsieur, in groping my way about in strange surroundings." He replied with simple dignity. "I have not gained what you call self-confidence. Monsieur and Madame Jarvis have been most kind, but I should have felt de trop."

The arrival of the Chief Medical Examiner interrupted the proceedings and Inspector Druet accompanied him to the museum, where Martin and Yost mounted guard behind the locked door.

With the departure of the official the tense atmosphere relaxed somewhat and a stir of movement swept the little group.

Norwood had started forward to follow the Inspector, but the latter closed the door behind him with a hint which brooked no opposition.

Jarvis, too, sprang to his feet.

"I must go to her!" he cried brokenly. "I cannot endure

the thought that strange, alien hands should desecrate her now! Uncle Cal, we must see about getting her home!"

"Not yet, Mr. Jarvis." Terhune interposed smoothly. "The formalities must be complied with, you know, and the matter is out of our hands."

"Oliver, our personal feelings must not interfere with the course of justice," supplemented Norwood. "After all, our one aim now is to get at the truth."

Captain Marchal had made his way to a window seat and dropped wearily upon it with his face in shadow.

Dennis glanced toward him and asked in a cautious undertone.

"Do you think he told the truth, Mac; about no one coming here this afternoon?"

"And why not?" McCarty demanded. "If Mrs. Jarvis' body was brought up the ladder and in through that museum window, and the murderer left the same way even with that rattling, clattering skeleton in his arms, Captain Marchal would not have heard a sound of it in here and there would have been no need for the murderer to come into this part of the house at all."

"Then why was the museum door unlocked?" retorted Dennis argumentatively. "If this young feller can be believed he didn't leave it so at four o'clock this afternoon, then somebody must have opened it between then and the time we went in there to-night. The lad wasn't any too anxious to go with us, either, if you remember."

"It's a good thing you're not the jury sitting on him," averred McCarty in disgust. "You'd be handing in the verdict before court opened! Wait till we find out what's gone on in that house beyond the back fence!"

Terhune meanwhile was plying his client with questions in his turn, but he had succeeded in eliciting no detail from

the private life of the Jarvises which would throw the slightest glimmer of light upon the tragedy when the muffled trend of heavy footsteps in steady, measured unison echoed down the hall, the front door closed resoundingly and Inspector Druet reappeared.

"Now we'll get down to business," he remarked briskly. "I want to make an examination of your house next, Mr. Jarvis, and your presence is necessary. If you will lead the way through the rear yards——?"

He paused and Oliver Jarvis who had risen at his entrance demanded hoarsely.

"What of my wife? Your Chief Medical Examiner— he's taken the place of the Coroner, hasn't he? Did he discover when——?"

"Mrs. Jarvis' death occurred approximately six hours ago." The inspector glanced at the clock on the mantel which indicated the quarter hour past eleven. "That would make it between five and six o'clock, sir."

"While I cooled my heels at the French consulate!" groaned Jarvis bitterly. "I—I may take her home now? That is all there is left which I can do for her."

The Inspector shook his head.

"The body has been removed," he announced as gently as he could. "There must be an autopsy, but in this case, when the cause of death is so patent it will amount to only a few simple tests as a matter of record. The body will be conveyed to your home to-morrow morning, But now, Mr. Jarvis, we are losing valuable time."

"I am ready." The younger man remarked quietly as with an unconscious movement he squared his shoulders.

Calvin Norwood was at his side and the secretary had started up from his seat by the window, but Inspector Druet's voice halted him.

"You need not come, Captain Marchal, nor will it be necessary for you, Mr. Norwood——"

"Nevertheless, I propose to accompany my friend," declared Norwood. "His wife's body was discovered in my house and I have every right to know how it got here. I intend to investigate this terrible matter thoroughly for myself, Inspector, with no hindrance from the authorities!"

Inspector Druet shrugged and turned to the others.

"You'll come, of course, Mr. Terhune, and you, Mac. Riordan, too, if he likes. I'll leave Marton and Yost here." He glanced significantly at the blind secretary's impassive face. "Mr. Norwood, how was it customary for those using that door cut in the fence to gain entrance to your house? Surely not through the museum window?"

"By no means." The host, still indignant, responded frigidly. "The back stairway leads to a private hall unconnected with the kitchen quarters which ends in a door opening directly into the yard."

He led the way down the stairs and through the narrow passageway to the door at the farther end. As he flung it open the keen autumnal night wind smote them and a few dry leaves swirled in and eddied at their feet, but the square of blackness which met their gaze was relieved only by patches of subdued light from the rows of curtained windows at the rear of the houses on the next street.

While they hesitated Norwood stepped back and pressed a switch in the wall and instantly the yard was revealed in a flood of blinding light in which the stark outlines of a stunted tree or two stood out in bold relief against the vine-clad walls. A brick walk divided the patch of sward in the center and at its end a small white door broke the expanse of the rear wall and creaked as it swung idly upon its hinges.

"Is that door usually left unfastened?" asked Terhune suddenly.

"N—no," stammered Norwood.

"Who has the keys to fit it?"

"Only my niece and—and Mrs. Jarvis."

They had started down the path a few paces when Terhune paused and glanced back at the slender ladder silhouetted against the house. The open space between the floor of the museum extension and the ground formed a sort of porch in the shadow of which the windows of the rear basement could be seen.

"That is the kitchen, isn't it?" Inspector Druet asked. "Your cook must have been there between five and six preparing dinner, Mr. Norwood. It is odd that she did not see the murderer place the ladder at the window directly above and climb up with his burden; it could not have been quite dark at that hour."

"The cook is elderly and has very weak eyes," responded Norwood. "She pulls down the shades and lights up at the first approach of dusk."

"I'll question her to-morrow." The Inspector turned toward the little door in the fence, and as the rest followed Dennis caught McCarty's arm in a mighty grip.

"Holy saints!" he gasped. "There's something there!"

"Where!" McCarty demanded.

"In the yard beyond!" Dennis was staring straight ahead of him and his tone was sepulchral. "When the door swung open just now I saw it; something white and flitting!"

Terhune sprang to the passageway they had just left and turned the switch, plunging the yard in darkness once more.

"Now come on!" Inspector Druet led the way, but Oliver Jarvis dashed forward and reached the little door in advance of the others.

"Ah, Madame, it is you?" They heard a little cry in a clear feminine voice. "I have been so alarmed——"

They crowded through the doorway and beheld Jarvis confronted by a girl whose frilled apron and cap gleamed whitely in the darkness.

Inspector Druet whipped out an electric torch and flashed it full into her face and she drew back with a faint scream which died in her throat. Her trembling hands shaded her eyes and as the light flared about she beheld the drawn, grief-distorted face of her employer and the little knot of grim, determined men behind him.

"What is it!" she whispered, swaying. "Madame—she!"

"What are you doing here, Margot?" demanded Jarvis.

"Madame!" Her voice rose in a shriek, unheeding. "It has come!"

Lurching forward, her body crumpled and she fell prone at their feet.

CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER HOUSE

THE rear basement door of the Jarvis house stood wide and a low light glowed forth as McCarty and Dennis lifted the limp slender form of the unconscious girl between them and under the direction of her employer, bore it into the house and along the narrow hall to the servant's dining-room, where they deposited it upon a lounge.

Jarvis himself poured water from a pitcher which stood upon the sideboard and dashed it into the girl's face.

"Give her air!" Dennis admonished. "She's only fainted! —There! She's coming to!"

The flaxen head with its drenched wisp of a cap all awry had stirred upon the cushion and her frightened blue eyes opened suddenly, and rested full upon her employer. Bewilderment gave place to swift apprehension and as swiftly a look of belated caution veiled them as she struggled to sit upright.

"What is it, Monsieur Norwood?" she asked in a faint, trembling voice. "What has happened? Ah, I remember! Monsieur came upon me so suddenly in the garden—Has Madame returned?"

The sharp note of anxiety and fear betrayed itself in her tones and Jarvis countered sternly.

"When did Madame go out, Margot?"

"I do not know." The girl had risen and catching at

a chair for support, shrank slowly away from him. "This afternoon when Madame returned from shopping, she said that she had a slight headache and would rest for an hour; that I was not to disturb her until she rang. But it grew late and I remembered Madame's dinner engagement; I ventured at last to go to her room but she was not there. She had gone!—Monsieur, why do you look at me like that! Has—has something happened to Madame?"

"What did you expect would happen to her, my girl?" Inspector Druet stepped forward and his peremptory tones cut the tense air like a whip lash.

The girl wheeled and as she noted his uniform her pale face grayed and her fluttering hands crept to her throat.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "Where is Madame? Oh, in mercy, tell me, Messieurs! Where is Madame Jarvis?"

"Don't you know?" The Inspector's keen eyes seemed to bore through her wavering ones. "What did you mean just now in the yard when you said: 'It has come'?"

"Did I say that, Monsieur?" Margot's own eyes shifted and fell. "I did not know; I was startled, I—ah, tell me! What has happened to Madame?"

"I can't stand this!" Oliver Jarvis muttered hoarsely. "Margot, your mistress is—is——"

"Dead." The Inspector finished for him as he hesitated.

"Ah, Mon Dieu, not that! Not that! Say that it is not so, Monsieur, that it is a lie! Madame is not dead!"

She sprang forward and seized her employer's arm in a frenzied grasp but reading irrevocable confirmation in his tragic eyes, she burst into wild weeping.

For a space no coherent word could be coaxed or bullied from her as she sank upon the couch once more and buried her face in her hands, her slim body rocking with the storm of sobs which swept over her. When the violence of her

emotion had abated somewhat Inspector Druet laid a not unkindly hand upon her shoulder.

"Now then, my girl, you must brace up and answer me. Your name is Margot, isn't it?"

At his touch she stiffened and after a moment raised a dull, tear-stained face from which all expression seemed to have fled as she nodded dumbly.

"At what time, Margot, did Mrs. Jarvis return from shopping this afternoon?"

The girl moistened her dry lips.

"At four o'clock, Monsieur."

"She complained of feeling ill. Did she lie down immediately?"

"I do not know, Monsieur. I got Madame into a negligee and went upon my errand."

"What errand? You did not mention it a minute ago." The Inspector eyed her sharply.

"Madame sent me to a shop down-town to change some garments she had purchased and which did not fit," Margot explained. "She told me not to disturb her on my return, but to wait until she rang."

"When did you get back?"

"At half-past five, Monsieur. Madame's dinner engagement was for seven."

"How long did you wait before going to her room?"

"For an hour, Monsieur; until half-past six. I knocked several times but there was no reply and at last I entered. Madame was not there."

No shade of defiance colored the well-trained deference of her tone, yet her reluctance was manifest and Inspector Druet asked quickly:

"Was the room in order? Did anything indicate that Mrs. Jarvis' rest had been disturbed or that she had left in haste?"

"No, Monsieur. The negligee was lying across the chaise-longue and the slippers on the floor beside it, but the cushions were quite smooth and the bed itself was untouched——"

She paused with a slight catch in her breath and Inspector Druet pressed home his advantage.

"So Mrs. Jarvis had not lain down to rest, after all. When she mentioned her headache, did she appear to be really ill, Margot?"

"But no. Madame's eyes were very bright, and her color—oh, Monsieur, how was it that she died?"

"You will learn all that later." The Inspector evaded another possible outbreak of hysteria. "Where were the other servants during the afternoon? Were they all in the house?"

"No, Monsieur, only the housemaid and she was in her room nursing a toothache. Since there was to be no dinner at home, Madame had given both the cook and Henry a holiday."

"Have they returned yet?"

"Yes, Monsieur. They both came in before eleven o'clock and went to their rooms."

"How is it that you did not go to bed? Do you always wait up for Mrs. Jarvis?"

"Not always." The girl hesitated once more. "But to-night I—I was uneasy about Madame. Her departure without ringing for me to dress her——"

"Margot," the Inspector interrupted with a trace of sternness in his tones. "What were you doing out in the yard at this hour when we came upon you?"

"The house stifled me; I wanted the fresh air." Her eyes wavered and fell. "Madame had intended to return very early and when she did not come I—I became nervous, alarmed——"

"Why? You had some other reason for your fears than the mere fact that your mistress had gone out without summoning you." The Inspector thrust his face close to that of the shrinking girl. "Margot, I want the truth. Did you surmise what had taken place in this house during your absence this afternoon? When you cried out to us 'It has come!' you knew that your mistress was dead——"

"Ah, no! No, Monsieur!" Her voice rose in a protesting wail. "Madame was not even ill, a headache, only! When I saw Monsieur Jarvis' face there in the garden I knew that something unfortunate—an accident, perhaps—must have happened to Madame! That it had come true!"

"What had come true?" demanded Oliver Jarvis hoarsely.

"My dream," Margot responded. "Last night I dreamed that Madame was suffering, in danger! I ventured to tell of it this morning, but although she only laughed at me I could not put it from my thoughts for at my home in Louvain before the Germans came I had warning in my dreams of what was to be, Monsieur. Oh, was it an accident that befell Madame?"

Dennis' eyes were goggling in superstitious awe as he glanced at McCarty, but the latter was gazing intently at the girl with an expression of bland incredulity not unmingled with admiration.

"That will do for now." The Inspector turned to Oliver Jarvis. "I won't rout out the other servants; there will be time enough for them in the morning. They sleep on the top floor, I suppose?"

Jarvis nodded.

"I should like to see the lower portion of the house now and particularly Mrs. Jarvis' apartments," continued the Inspector. "Margot, we shall not need you any more to-night but don't attempt to leave the house; I want to have a further talk with you to-morrow."

The girl bowed and started for the door, then turned in swift supplication to her employer.

"Monsieur!" she cried brokenly. "You know how I have loved Madame! Now you tell me that she is dead but I may not know the cause. Madame was alive and well but a few short hours ago! Ah, Monsieur, in pity tell me how Madame came to her death!"

Jarvis essayed to reply, but no words came, and mutely he motioned toward the official.

The latter considered for a moment and then announced slowly:

"She was murdered, Margot."

"Murdered!" The echo was a mere whisper and the girl's eyes dark with horror traveled from face to face of the group before her as if seeking a denial of the dread truth. "I cannot believe—It must have been some frightful mistake! What madman has done this?"

"That is what we are here to find out," the Inspector responded gruffly. "You may go."

Margot still hesitated, then timidly she approached her employer.

"I—I will pray for the soul of Madame," she whispered and turning stumbled blindly from the room.

The lower floors of the Jarvis house were laid out much after the same plan as the Norwood residence and although evidently erected at approximately the same period it had later been remodeled and decorated. The music-room had been elongated into a small ball-room, the staircase widened and a tiny conservatory added at the back. Nowhere was there sign of confusion or disorder and the grim little party made its way upstairs.

At the threshold of the dead woman's private apartments, Oliver Jarvis drew back with a moan of uncontrollable anguish.

"Don't, dear boy! Don't go in now!" urged Norwood gently. "You've endured all that you can for to-night——"

"No, Uncle Cal." The young man braced himself in dogged determination. "I must see this through. I must learn the truth!"

They entered the sitting-room exquisite in its soft, rose-shaded lights, eloquent in the studied simplicity of the groupings of rare old furniture and priceless rugs and draperies of the loving care and unostentatiously applied wealth which had been expended to provide a fitting shrine for the bride of five years before. The bedroom into which they passed after a brief scrutiny was tragic in its little intimate hints of a vibrant, living presence; the gold toilet articles upon the dresser, the book open and face down on the table, a crumpled lace handkerchief, a faint perfume—the 'Rose d'Amour' of which the blind secretary had spoken—that still lingered in the air, the night-dress and tiny slippers which lay expectantly beside the turned-back covers of the bed.

Jarvis, whose fortitude despite his efforts was visibly breaking during their progression through the apartments, now broke down utterly with the grief of overwhelming realization and he sank upon his knees beside the bed.

"Leave me!" he choked, in response to Norwood's compassionate approach. "I want to be alone!" You can see for yourselves that there is nothing here, gentlemen! I shall have myself in hand again by to-morrow, but now I feel that I have reached the end of my endurance. I must be alone to face this thing which has come upon me or I shall go mad!"

It would seem that he spoke truly. There had been no slightest indication of violence or disturbance anywhere in the serene charm of the well-ordered apartments and after a final glance about and whispered word of consolation from

Norwood, they turned to the door of the dressing-room beyond.

"By the twenty-four feet of the twelve apostles!" The exclamation burst like a mighty oath from McCarty's lips as for a moment the others halted transfixed upon the threshold and the kneeling figure by the bed started up in renewed consternation.

"What is it?" he demanded hoarsely, but no one replied to him.

The little dressing-room was in chaos. Dainty, spindle-legged chairs were flung about, drawers were open and their silken contents billowed out upon the floor, the wardrobe ransacked and from a shattered glass vase beside an overturned table a cluster of wilting roses lay in a sodden mass. The door of a small wall safe swung back upon its hinges and the aperture loomed empty and bare.

"I think we need search no further for the scene of the actual crime, Inspector." Terhune's voice was filled with quiet satisfaction. "It was here, without a doubt, that Mrs. Jarvis fought for her life."

Inspector Druet nodded and his lips tightened as he glanced about the wreck of the pretty room and turned to where Oliver Jarvis stood staring with dazed, horrified eyes.

"Robbery," he announced. "Your wife must have heard someone moving about in here as she prepared to rest and entering been attacked and finally strangled to prevent her giving an alarm. A mighty bold, desperate attempt, in daylight, too! It looks as if it must have been an inside job."

"It couldn't have been!" Jarvis stammered. "You heard what Margot said; none of the servants were at home but the housemaid and she was ill, at the top of the house. Besides, nothing was taken——"

"The safe is empty," Inspector Druet remarked quickly.

"Were not Mrs. Jarvis' jewels there? How can you be sure that nothing of value is missing?"

"Because there was nothing of value here; of sufficient value, at least, to warrant such an attempt," responded the other. "It may be that a few small brooches, a plain platinum wrist watch and articles of that sort were taken but they would scarcely have tempted a thief to commit such a hideous crime for their possession. All my wife's jewels—her diamonds and pearls and pigeon-blood rubies—are locked away in our safe deposit vault. I took them downtown and placed them there myself only yesterday, to remain until our return from abroad and all our servants knew it, so that even if they were not beyond all question, there would have been no incentive for robbery. The gold toilet articles were untouched upon the dresser; you must have seen that as we came through. I—I cannot understand!"

"And poor Evelyn was still wearing her emerald ring," supplemented Norwood. "I noticed it there in the museum. Why did not the murderer tear it from her finger if he were after mere gain? It must be almost priceless."

Jarvis shuddered.

"You forget, Uncle Cal, that it could not have been disposed of." He turned to the rest in explanation. "The emerald is an heirloom in my family and was my betrothal gift to my wife, the only jewel she resolved to take with her to France. It is square and of wonderful color but our coat of arms is cut so deeply into it as to render it practically valueless if it were shaved down and in its present state it could be too easily traced for anyone to dare dispose of it. It may be that a thief broke in, knowing of the other jewels but ignorant of their removal and my poor wife came upon him. It seems incredible, however, that such an attempt would have been made before dark, at any rate, in a house presumably full of servants."

Terhune who had been quietly but minutely inspecting the chaos of the room now turned to his client.

"Mr. Jarvis, was there anything aside from the jewels here that to your knowledge would have been of peculiar personal value to anyone? I mean something the possession of which would be vital to them? This room has been subjected to a hasty but almost frenzied search, presumably after the safe was opened, and it is scarcely conceivable that the thief would ransack wardrobes and dresser drawers for jewels which he had failed to find there."

Oliver Jarvis eyed him in blank amazement.

"What could there have been?" he asked. "My wife never kept negotiable securities or large sums of money in the house, and if by peculiar personal value you mean any object of a secret or compromising nature, Mr. Terhune, I can only assure you again that her own life was an open book and her associates above question or reproach. Her sympathies were warm but she was far too high-minded to have lent herself to any confidence of a scandalous or disgraceful sort. This hideous thing must have been the work of a common thief, a burglar, and yet I cannot understand how he managed to time his coming so adroitly, nor how he gained entrance."

The dressing-room possessed two doors beside the one by which they had entered, one of which led to the bathroom beyond, and the other to the hall. The last named was locked and bolted from the inside, the bathroom furnished no evidence of a possible intruder and nowhere was there a clue except the marks upon the door of the safe which had been jimmied open in a professional manner.

After a cursory examination of the closets and wardrobes Inspector Druet glanced with a shrug at the dainty Dresden clock which ticked with gay insouciance upon the mantel and announced:

"Late as it is, I've got to arouse the servants, Mr. Jarvis, and question them. Will you give orders that they are to come to me at once downstairs, say, in your dining-room?"

"You wish to see Margot again, also?" Oliver Jarvis halted in the doorway, still with that stunned look upon his face.

"Margot, by all means," the Inspector retorted. "And, if you please, say nothing of the condition in which we found this room."

When the stricken master of the house had departed upon his errand, Inspector Druet turned to where McCarty and Dennis communed together.

"Mac, I'll want you with me; Riordan, can I press you into service?"

"That you can, sir!" Dennis stepped forward briskly.

"Run back through the yards to Mr. Norwood's house and tell Yost I need him here. Martin can stay where he is but I want Yost on guard at the front of this house and you take the back till after I've searched it from top to bottom."

Carefully locking all entrances to the dead woman's apartments, Inspector Druet pocketed the keys and followed by Norwood, Terhune and McCarty he proceeded to the dining-room downstairs, where Jarvis joined them.

Margot, still fully dressed, was the first of the servants to appear. Her face bore traces of recent violent emotion but it was now composed and over her stolid Flemish features a certain wary impassivity had settled.

"You had not retired, Margot?" The Inspector glanced sharply at her attire.

"Could sleep come to me on this night, Monsieur?" she retorted but quietly. "I have been walking the floor of my room, trying to make myself comprehend that it is true, this terrible thing which you have told me."

The Inspector spread his notes out upon the table before him.

"Margot, you say that you went upon your errand this afternoon shortly after four o'clock and returned at half-past five; that you waited for an hour, until half-past six, before going to your mistress' apartments. Where were you during that hour?"

"In my room, Monsieur, and in that of Etta, the housemaid, applying hot cloths to her face. She was in great pain."

"You then went to your mistress' rooms and found she had gone," the Inspector pursued. "Did you look through her entire apartment, the dressing-room and bath, as well as the other rooms?"

"Yes, Monsieur." The girl glanced hastily up at him and then dropped her eyes.

"And everything was in perfect order, then, in all the apartment? No room showed the slightest sign of disturbance?"

"None, Monsieur. All was as usual, in perfect order," she repeated quietly.

McCarty drew a deep breath and glanced at Terhune, but the latter was listening with an imperturbable expression. Inspector Druet leaned forward in his chair and his voice took on an added note of sternness.

"This occurred at half-past six?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"What did you do then?"

"I went down to the kitchen and prepared some broth for Etta, and took it to her room." Margot replied without hesitation. "She could not eat and begged of me to go away and let her alone; the pain had made her acariâtre—how do you say? Of an ill humor. I returned to the kitchen for my own dinner and then went once more to Madame's apart-

ments, where I arranged her bed for the night, laid out her gown and slippers and took some lingerie which required mending down to the servants' dining-room in the basement."

"At what time was this?"

"I do not know to the moment, Monsieur. It must have been between seven and eight o'clock."

"Did you enter the dressing-room?"

"But yes, Monsieur." Again she darted a glance at him. "For Madame's night-robe and slippers and also the lingerie and work-basket."

"All was in order then?"

"Of course, Monsieur." Her replies came more quickly with a rising inflection as of apprehension.

"Margot, at what hour did you return again to Mrs. Jarvis' apartments?" The Inspector demanded impressively. Margot shrugged.

"I have not entered them again, Monsieur, since that hour. There was no need; I had made all ready for Madame's coming. The lingerie and work-basket are still in the basement dining-room; all the evening I remained there trying to sew but I was so uneasy about Madame that I could not finish my task. Then it grew late, I became alarmed, I went out into the garden for a breath of air and you found me, Monsieur. That is as I have told you."

Inspector Druet rose slowly.

"You are prepared to swear that you were in Mrs. Jarvis' dressing-room between seven and eight o'clock and left it at that hour undisturbed and in proper order?"

Margot drew herself up to her slim height and regarded him steadily.

"Yes, Monsieur. I do not know what it is that Monsieur's questions mean, but I swear that Madame's apartments were quite as usual when last I entered them, before eight o'clock this night."

CHAPTER V

DENNIS SCORES

IMMEDIATELY after Margot had been dismissed old Henry, the Jarvis' butler made his appearance, and close upon his heels came the cook, her portly form clad in a weirdly striped wrapper, her ruddy countenance grim with exasperation at being haled from her bed at so unseemly an hour.

She paled, however, at sight of the Inspector's uniform and turned hurriedly to her employer.

"Oh, sir, whatever is the matter? Margot told me nothing when she woke me——"

"There has been a burglary committed here." Inspector Druet announced before Oliver Jarvis could speak.

"Burglars! The saints preserve——"

"Never mind that now!" The Inspector broke in sharply upon her exclamation. "What time did you leave the house to-day?"

"Right after lunch was cleared away, sir; along about half-past two. Mrs. Jarvis gave me the afternoon and evening off and I went to my sister's, in Brooklyn." The cook glanced about her with wildly startled eyes. "If you please, sir, where is Mrs. Jarvis?"

"She will not be home to-night." Inspector Druet added quickly: "When did you return to the house?"

"At half-past ten, sir. Henry got in just ahead of me; didn't you, Henry?"

She turned for confirmation to the butler who nodded his white head solemnly.

"Did you notice any signs of disturbance? Hear anything?" demanded her interrogator.

"No, sir!" The cook gasped and laid a fat hand upon her capacious bosom in the region of her heart. "Glory be! We might all have been murdered in our beds! There was a light in the front basement but I thought it was only Margot waiting up, maybe, for Mrs. Jarvis. There were low lights, too, in the halls, but they are always left lit and I didn't hear a sound or see anything at all as I went on up to my room. Was it much that was took, sir? Did the burglar get away?"

The Inspector silenced her importunities and dismissed her, then turned to the butler who stood aside, his spare, dignified figure wrapped toga-wise in his bath-robe.

"Henry, what time did you come in?"

"A moment before cook, sir; I was closing the door when she came up behind me. I know nothing whatever of any burglar, sir, but I'm positive none was in the house when I entered, nor after, for I'm a light sleeper and I would have heard him. You'll excuse me, sir, but was the silver touched? It's been in my charge these forty years and never a piece missing——"

The aged man's distress was very real and it was equally evident that he knew nothing which could throw light upon the mystery. Reassured as to the safety of the silver he too was allowed to depart and the Inspector glanced significantly at Oliver Jarvis.

"Your housemaid seems unwilling to put in an appearance," he observed. "I might suggest that you send for her again——"

"I'll bring her if I have to drag her from her bed!" declared Jarvis with sudden violence as he started for the door. At

that moment, however, there came a light tap upon it and without waiting for response it opened and a plump, buxom girl with a shawl draped over her kimono slipped into the room and stood half sullenly, half defiantly before them. Her red hair was caught back in a rumpled, untidy braid, and the lower part of her face was swathed in bandages above which her round eyes glared with resentment and fright.

"My aunt says there's been a burglary, but I know nothing of it," she began. "I'm near dead with the pain in my tooth——"

"Your aunt is the cook?" interrupted the Inspector brusquely. "Why did you not come at once when you were summoned?"

The girl tossed her head mutinously.

"That Margot didn't say what I was wanted for, and how was I to know, at this time of night, that there was trouble? I've been in my bed since noon and not a sound have I heard in the house since my aunt went out after lunch, except when Margot came in and put hot cloths to my face, and then brought me the bite of supper I couldn't touch. There's nothing I can tell you, sir, and if you don't mind I'll be getting back to my room, for it's draughty——"

"Just a minute." The Inspector eyed her sharply.

"You did not leave your room at all during the afternoon?"

"No, sir; nor since, until now."

"Did you hear your aunt and the butler come in?"

"I did not, sir. I must have dozed off after Margot went away with the tray, but even if I'd been awake, I would have paid small heed to any noise that might have come to me, what with the pain and all." Etta mumbled through the bandages which held her jaw as in a vise, and her brown eyes roved from one to another of the little group. "I'm sure I'm sorry if—if anything was took, but I'm not to blame. I wasn't left in charge of the house and besides, the burglar

might have been in the very next room to me and I'd not have noticed, I was that crazed with my toothache!"

"Very well, Etta. You may go now, but I shall want to see you to-morrow." Inspector Druet gathered up his papers and as the girl scuttled from the room without more ado, he turned to the others. "We'll take a last look over the house, now, and then get back to Mr. Norwood's."

A hasty but systematic search vouchsafed them no further clues and an examination of every door and accessible window by which the assassin might have gained entrance failed to reveal the slightest mark of applied force.

After a few parting whispered words of consolation to the bereaved man from Norwood they left the house and made their way back through the little door in the fence to the latter's home.

As they brought up the rear Dennis remarked to McCarty:

"You're thinking that girl Margot lied? She knew about the crime all along? Maybe she was waiting in the yard for the murderer himself——"

"I'd not go so far as to say that," responded McCarty cautiously. "But 'twas a mighty convenient dream she had on the spur of the moment. With a gift like that, Denny, and a pack of cards she could be making her everlasting fortune!"

"You don't believe in it?" There was a trace of superstitious awe in Dennis' tone.

"Devil a bit!" his companion retorted stoutly. "If she didn't actually know, she suspected well enough what might have happened to her mistress when we found her here in the yard and if I was the Inspector I'd have the truth out of her. I've not figured out yet why she stood up to it that Mrs. Jarvis' rooms were not disturbed when she knew we must have seen with our own eyes the state that the dressing-room was in; she'd had plenty of time, too,

to straighten it again if she'd wanted to keep from us the fact that it has been ransacked like that."

"I noticed one thing," Dennis observed. "The news of Mrs. Jarvis' death itself floored her, but the manner of it—that it was murder—didn't seem to surprise her, and she never even asked how or where it had been done."

"Still, I wouldn't say she was a party to it, nor that her grief over it wasn't real enough," demurred McCarty. "The manner of the other girl, Etta, is as much on my mind. A toothache she may have had, Denny, but 'twould take more than that to choke off a woman's natural curiosity about a burglary that had been committed under the same roof with her, if she was entirely ignorant of it. That young woman didn't want to hear a word of it; all she wanted was to get away out of sight without being asked any more questions herself. One thing is sure; there's no love lost between her and Margot."

When they re-entered the Norwood house the blind secretary met them at the library door, his sensitive face alive with eager questioning.

"It was a burglar, Victor." Norwood dropped wearily into a chair and replied to the mute appeal. "She was killed in her own dressing-room and why her murderer brought the body here I cannot imagine. It would seem the act of an insane person——"

"Madame Jarvis was killed in her own dressing-room!" Marchal repeated slowly. "That is what you have learned, Monsieur. But how do you—— What proof is there——"

"Her safe is forced open and empty and the room is a wreck; everywhere the signs are unmistakable of the terrific struggle which must have taken place——" Norwood was beginning when Terhune advanced and interrupted him smoothly.

"Captain Marchal looks quite done up. If the Inspector

does not require anything further of him to-night I would suggest that he be excused."

Inspector Druet nodded understandingly.

"Yes, Captain. You have helped us all you can, I am sure, and it is very late. We won't detain you any longer."

Marchal bowed.

"If Monsieur Norwood——" he began.

"You had better go to bed now and get what rest you can after this terrible business," Calvin Norwood advised. "We will have hard days ahead of us, Victor. Gad! I never thought when I took up the investigation of crime as a mere hobby years ago that it would strike home to me like this! If it were my own niece who had been throttled by some fiend in human form I could scarcely be more deeply affected. But we'll get him, gentlemen! We'll get him! Good-night, Victor——"

"Good-night, Monsieur Norwood. You will call me if I can be of any assistance?"

As the secretary bowed and retired the butler appeared in the doorway. He was a corpulent, middle-aged individual with a rotund face from which the florid color had departed in streaks and his earlier dignity had perceptibly fallen from him.

"H'excuse me, Mr. Norwood," he stammered. "But the 'ousemaid is still in 'ysterics, sir, and cook is packing; she says as 'ow shé won't stay another hour h'under a roof where maybe a murderer is 'iding and 'er not being h'able to see or 'ear very good if 'e was to get after 'er, sir."

"I'd better see them, I suppose, and reassure them." Norwood rose.

"I'll go with you." The Inspector announced. "I have a few questions to put to them and then my preliminary report will be complete."

Left alone, Wade Terhune eyed his involuntary colleagues elatedly.

"A remarkable case in some aspects, eh, McCarty?"

"It is that, sir," the ex-Roundsman agreed, adding with unconscious wistfulness. "It's a rare bit of luck for you to have been on the ground when it was first discovered, being as you're in charge of the investigation now for Mr. Jarvis. I'd like well to have a hand in it myself."

"Perhaps we may be able to use you later on," the criminalist remarked consolingly. "I won't deny that you have a special knack for certain phases of the work which stood you in good stead last year. This case in a way is as elemental as the Rowntree affair and the motive is self-evident; then, too, it is not complicated by a mistaken identification as was the other, and I think we shall before very long find our field of suspects narrowed down to—but what has become of our good friend Riordan?"

"Denny?" McCarty glanced about him in amazement. "He was right here beside me a minute since! He'd not have followed the Inspector——"

At that moment Dennis' lean, lantern-jawed face appeared in the doorway, his gray eyes snapping with suppressed excitement.

"Whisht!" he admonished superfluously. "When they took the body out the Inspector forgot to lock the door to the museum. Come till I show you something!"

Nothing loath they followed him down the hall to the late scene of the tragedy. The room in the brilliant glare of light was in perfect order, the table upon which the body had rested bare and glistening in its coat of white enamel with the Mexican blanket folded neatly at its foot.

Dennis led them to the second window from the left, the sides of which now stood widely open into the room and with a dramatic flourish pointed outward and down.

"If you'll have a look at that ladder," he announced, "you'll find something squeezed in behind the first rung where it rests against the ledge that'll interest the both of you."

"What——" McCarty started forward but Terhune was before him. Leaning from the window where the two ends of the ladder protruded above the sill he reached down and drew forth a limp, crumpled, brown object which he smoothed into a semblance of shape.

"A glove!" McCarty marveled. "A man's glove—chauffeur's, by the smell of it!"

A strong odor of gasoline assailed their nostrils and the glove originally a soft brown was smeared with oil and grease in streaks of greenish black.

"Unless it is a cast-off the man who wore it was no ordinary chauffeur," Terhune remarked. "It is a trifle smaller than the average size, handsewn and of the very best quality. Imported, too; I thought so."

He showed the maker's trade-mark upon the clasp and then turning it inside out he examined it with care.

"Think of that now!" McCarty rubbed his chin reflectively and added. "I wonder how it came to stick on the ladder? There's quite a wind blowing, the night."

"The fellow, whoever he was, probably dropped it in reaching up to pry open the window catch and it fell upon the rung of the ladder against the ledge. Then in mounting his foot trod upon it and wedged it in between the ladder and the house wall." Terhune hastily reconstructed the incident in theory. Then he turned to Dennis. "Was that exactly as you found it? Why didn't you bring it to us?"

"I've no mind to get in Dutch with the police by disturbing evidence," the latter responded virtuously. "I put it back just as I found it and left the rest to you. Wouldn't you think the feller would've missed it?"

"And gone blundering around a dark yard hunting for it, with a skeleton to keep him company and that dead body in here to raise the alarm any minute?" McCarty demanded derisively. "It is your idea, Mr. Terhune, that he came up the ladder first and pried the window open, and then went down and got the body—which he'd likely hid behind some bush—and climbed back up again?"

"How else?" Terhune shrugged.

"Well," remarked McCarty slowly, "I'm thinking it'd take more nerve than the average, or else he was a plain lunatic. There's the back windows of the houses on both streets staring at him, to say nothing of the fact that Mr. Norwood or that young Frenchman was apt to come in here any minute and catch him at his job. Why didn't he leave the poor thing there in her own dressing-room where he killed her, and beat it? Why should he have gone to all this trouble and risk, and then left the evidence back there behind him——"

"We will learn that when we have found him and induced him to talk," Terhune assured the other coolly. "Even with your singularly moribund deductive faculty, my dear McCarty, one salient point in this case must have impressed itself upon you; the murderer was no stranger to either house or their occupants. I will go further; I think I may say even at this early stage of the investigation that he was on casual, if not intimate, terms with certain members of both households. He knew the habits, the hours, the plans of each family and gauged his time to a nicety. That Mrs. Jarvis returned unexpectedly to the house because of her headache instead of continuing her round of social calls and discovered him at his work is one hypothesis which may possibly be entertained——"

"But you don't hold with it, sir?" McCarty interrupted shrewdly.

Terhune smiled.

"At any rate, he had undoubtedly ascertained the fact that Mr. Norwood would be absent this afternoon before carrying out his daring scheme as to the disposition of the body," he evaded. "I tell you, McCarty, I have a cordial admiration for an adversary of such caliber! It will be a positive pleasure to match my scientific qualifications against his native resourcefulness and I may add without boasting that I have no misgivings as to the result."

"No, sir," McCarty acquiesced respectfully. "Though I can't understand why the girl Margot insisted the dressing-room was in order when she'd deliberately left it as she must have found it, as if she had wanted us to catch her in a bare-faced lie, I've no doubt in the world but that you'll find out the truth and lay the murderer by the heels. I can't say I've any admiration for a strangler of women, no matter how clever, but 'twould give me as much pleasure as you to get him. I wonder, now, did he take it into consideration that the secretary was at home to maybe interrupt him in his little scheme, or did he count him out, being blind?"

Before the criminalist could reply a muffled but apparently agonized yell from the direction of the hearth made them turn. Dennis, bored with the analytical discussion of the situation and spurred on by his discovery of the glove, had extended his personal investigation to the chimney and all that was visible of him at the moment was his long legs dangling and kicking wildly in the aperture of the fireplace.

"Denny, what in——"

The words died in McCarty's throat for there came another stifled howl accompanied by a hollow rattling sound, and Dennis fell with a crash which scattered the dead ashes in a little cloud as he rolled out upon the hearth, wrapped

seemingly in the affectionate embrace of an angular, attenuated shape which gleamed horridly in the light.

"Take it off me!" wailed Dennis. "Holy mother! Take it away!"

Terhune uttered an exclamation but it went unheard as McCarty strode forward, jerked the gruesome object loose from his friend's prostrate form and dropped it with a clatter upon the table.

"What is it?" Dennis whispered fearfully as he sat up and wiped the sooty moisture from his forehead. "What was it got me then, Mac?"

"I'm thinking it's the lady you were so anxious to see when first we came in here, the night," McCarty responded with unsmiling gravity. "What with the glove and now this, you're doing well for an amateur, I'll say that for you. 'Tis the missing skeleton, no less, that you brought down the chimney with you, Denny, my lad!"

CHAPTER VI

THE CAKE MARKED "NOEL"

IT was after three o'clock in the morning when ex-Roundsman McCarty reached the modest rooms over Girard's antique shop where he kept bachelor hall. The varied excitements of the night, the thrill of being once more, if unofficially, back in the old man-hunting game had driven sleep far from his thoughts and it was dawn before his eyes closed.

Nevertheless, he awoke early with undiminished enthusiasm to the drizzling rain of a dull November day, and over his coffee in the little nearby restaurant which he frequented he scanned the newspapers eagerly. At the hour of going to press no information could have been obtainable of the crime save that contained in McCarty's own telephone message to Inspector Druet and the latter's summons of the Chief Medical Examiner and report to the Homicide Bureau.

He was not surprised, therefore, at the meager paragraph, substantially the same in each paper, announcing the sudden death "under suspicious circumstances" of Mrs. Oliver Jarvis, the brilliant young society leader and social worker at the home of the family friend, Mr. Calvin Norwood.

That Oliver Jarvis himself was present when the tragic event occurred was assumed, and the article in every instance concluded with a statement that the authorities had the affair under investigation.

One enterprising journal printed a photograph of the dead woman, evidently resurrected from the files of the time

of her marriage, for the costume was obviously out of date, but McCarty studied it with deep interest. There had been small trace of beauty in the swollen, blackened countenance which had stared up at him in the crime museum on the previous night, but the pictured face before him was very lovely in its girlish, ingenuous appeal. The soft, dark eyes, small straight nose and smiling, finely chiseled lips were set in a perfect oval crowned by a mass of cloud-like black hair and regarding it, McCarty's own blue eyes lost their twinkle and grew stern.

"I'd like to get my two hands on that strangler, once!" he muttered to himself as he drained his coffee cup and rose.

In the door of the restaurant he hesitated and then turned a reluctant back upon the corner around which Engine Company 023 was stationed, and raising his umbrella started for his rooms again. Dennis was on day duty and after a scant few hours' sleep would be in no mood to discuss the event of the previous night; moreover, on the way home he had proved distinctly "touchy" in regard to his exploit with the defunct Duchess of Piatra and his friend wisely concluded not to approach him on the subject of the crime until he could bring fresh news.

But how would he himself acquire it? Not at first hand, as in the old days. McCarty's spirits fell and he mentally anathematized the day his saloon-keeping uncle's money had descended to him and the first flush of prosperity had led him to resign from the force. He had been too long in uniform to gain lasting ease in the habiliments of a mere citizen, too long under orders to find profit or pleasure in the aimless days stretched out interminably before him, too long a man of action to appreciate the life of elegant leisure which had ensued, or derive from it aught but an utter boredom that corroded his honest soul.

Inspector Druet, the celebrated Terhune and Calvin

Norwood; there were enough detectives, amateur and professional, on the Jarvis case now, in all conscience, without a blundering old departmental has-been butting in where he wasn't wanted, and yet—

McCarty sighed lugubriously as he turned his own corner and then all at once his eyes brightened, his chin came up with the old lift and he stepped forward briskly, for there upon the doorstep beneath a dripping umbrella and registering outraged dignity in every bulbous curve of his portly form, stood the Norwood butler.

“Good-morning to you!” McCarty beamed upon him. “Were you looking for me?”

The butler turned and bowed stiffly.

“Good-morning, sir. Mr. Norwood sent me to say that h'if you 'ave an hour to spare 'e would be glad to see you. Being as you might say a confidential matter, 'e did not wish to h'employ a common messenger.”

The last was evidently added in personal justification and he sniffed audibly as his supercilious glance swept the shabby neighborhood.

McCarty shifted his own umbrella.

“I'll go right back with you now, my man,” he announced shortly. “Did Mr. Norwood give you any other word for me?”

“No, sir,” the butler responded with awakened servility to his change of tone. “'E seems quite done in h'over the 'orrible affair of larst night, and no wonder, sir! Did the police h'inspector find out who did it, h'if I may ask?”

McCarty turned and eyed him blandly.

“If he did, he's keeping it to himself,” he replied. “You didn't happen to see anything of a stranger about when you came home yesterday afternoon, did you?”

“Me, sir?” The butler's tone was as scandalized as though the question bore an imputation of complicity in the

crime. "Certainly not, sir! The young French gentleman was in the library and the maids in the kitchen. It was after six and I was a bit late so I went directly about my duties arranging the table for dinner. There was no sign of anything unusual about, sir."

During their brief, clattering subway journey the subject was dropped but as they emerged and started along a rain-swept cross street to the Norwood residence, McCarty asked in apparent irrelevancy.

"By the way, when was the last time you saw Mrs. Jarvis alive?"

"On Tuesday afternoon, late, sir," the other responded readily. "The poor lady was h'always running h'in and h'out of the 'ouse most informally when Miss Joan was at 'ome and she and Mr. Jarvis were like own children to Mr. Norwood, h'if I may say so. Mrs. Jarvis 'ad come to tell 'im something h'about Professor Parlowe, but Mr. Norwood was busy in the drawing-room with an odd sort of person who 'ad called and could not be disturbed, so I ushered 'er h'into the library, to Captain Marchal."

There was a note of lofty distaste in the butler's tone as he mentioned his employer's visitor and McCarty observed indifferently:

"I guess Mr. Norwood has all kinds of people calling on him, if so he can get anything from them to add to that museum collection of his."

"Yes, sir," the butler agreed resignedly. "When I first h'entered 'is service I didn't know what to make of it, sir. Rough-looking characters, and some as you might call outright jailbirds calling and being received-like gentry and took h'into the drawing-room, but I soon got used to it, h'although that museum h'always gave me a turn. And now look what's come of it all, sir! But the woman that called the other day, though h'ordinary, wasn't h'exactly

criminal in h'appearance; she was middle-aged and blousy, with untidy hair and shabby black clothes, and h'English, but not a Londoner, like me. Mr. Norwood talked with 'er for more than an hour, and Mrs. Jarvis didn't wait. That was the last I saw of the poor young lady alive."

"How did you know she had come to tell Mr. Norwood something about Professor Parlowe? He is the toxicologist, isn't he, that Mr. Norwood went to call on yesterday afternoon?"

The butler nodded.

"I don't know what you might call 'im, sir, but 'e's the one Mr. Norwood went to see, and Mrs. Jarvis brought 'im the word. I was just h'about to knock and ask h'if she would 'ave tea when the library door opened and Captain Marchal showed her out.

"'Please tell Uncle Cal I couldn't wait, won't you?' she says to the young French gentleman. 'And in case I forget to mention it to-morrow night, Captain Marchal, do remind him of Professor Parlowe's experiment on Friday. I know he wouldn't miss it for worlds, so I hurried straight here to tell him of it myself.' That is 'ow I know, sir. It's terrible to think of the poor young lady being dead now, to say nothing of 'er 'aving been murdered in cold blood! I 'ope for h'all our sakes as 'ow the police h'inspector finds out the truth."

McCarty echoed his sentiments, but in an absent-minded tone. An idea had come to him born of the butler's idle gossip which his first impulse was to cast from him as the wildest improbability, and yet preposterous as it seemed in the light of certain of the previous night's discoveries, other hitherto insignificant details recurred to his mind which appeared to give it weight almost against his will.

He pondered in silence until they reached their destination, when that presented itself which for the time being

drove all former speculation and conjecture from his thoughts.

"Ah, it's you, Mr. McCarty!" Calvin Norwood greeted him in unmistakable relief. "You came straight back with Billings? Good! There has been a curious development in the case and I knew you would be interested. Oliver came to me privately and I persuaded him to let me send for you, assuring him that you were discretion itself. He has telephoned to Mr. Terhune and I am afraid it will be our duty to take Inspector Druet also into our confidence when he comes, but I was anxious for your opinion."

McCarty's eyes sparkled.

"A curious development!" he repeated. "And what might it be, Mr. Norwood?"

"Come into the library and Oliver will show you himself."

They found Oliver Jarvis alone in the somber room staring down at the table before him on which stood two cardboard boxes, open. There was a curious tenseness in his drooped figure and the face he turned to them at their coming had aged ten years overnight. It was pallid and deeply lined, his blue eyes dull and sunken and the last traces of youth seemed to have vanished utterly from him.

"Good-morning, McCarty," he bowed. "It was good of you to come. I thought I could keep this thing quiet, but in view of the circumstances Mr. Norwood has shown me that it would be inexpedient. I only want to keep it from the press, if I can; not on my own account, although there will be notoriety enough, God knows, but because of her."

"I know, sir," McCarty responded quietly. "The boys will get nothing from me, you can bank on that. What is it that's come up?"

With a gesture Jarvis indicated the table and McCarty advanced and looked into the larger of the two boxes. There, banked in wads of soft, white oiled paper, he beheld

a huge, circular, frosted cake, its top elaborately iced in the highest perfection of the confectioner's art.

"A birthday cake!" he exclaimed.

"Not birthday, Christmas," Jarvis corrected him, gravely. "That word 'Noel' traced in pink icing in the center means 'Christmas' in French, you know."

"Does it, now!" McCarty still stared. "It's a trifle early for the compliments of the season, but what has it to do with the case?"

"I found it on the top shelf of the closet in my wife's dressing-room this morning," Jarvis replied slowly. "If you will look at it closely you will see that it is slightly dusty and the decorations are crumbling in places; it was evidently not made this year and I do not know how long it has been in my wife's possession, nor for what purpose she preserved it. I have never seen nor heard of it before."

"It looks like a tombstone!" McCarty shivered. "For all it's a fancy-looking affair and must have cost a lot of money, I thought it was only wedding cakes that people preserved a bit of, for a keepsake."

"Exactly," Calvin Norwood remarked drily. "That is what puzzles us both."

"And 'twas in Mrs. Jarvis' dressing-room you found it?" McCarty pursued.

Jarvis nodded.

"I suppose I had no right to enter her apartments after Inspector Druet had locked them up and taken away the keys, but I didn't stop to think of that," he admitted. "I walked the floor all last night, racking my brains for a solution of this frightful thing, and when morning came I could not endure it any longer. I felt that I must get into that dressing-room again myself and search for some clue to the vile wretch who had murdered her! Then I re-

called that I had a duplicate set of keys to my wife's apartments in my desk, and used them.

"The dressing-room was just as we had left it, of course, all in the wildest disorder and confusion and although I searched with the utmost care I found nothing, until I came to examine the closet which opened from it. The lower portion was filled with wearing apparel but on the top shelf far back in one corner behind bundles of disused clothing and that sort of thing I discovered these two boxes.

"The cake astonished me for I could not imagine where it had come from, nor why my wife had not told me of it, but when I opened the second box I felt as if the very ground had given way beneath my feet! I boasted last night to all of you that my wife's life was an open book and that she possessed no secrets from me, but now—my God! I don't know what to think!"

The second box was smaller than the first and comparatively flat. It contained what appeared to be square sheets cut from ordinary wrapping paper and covered with raised characters of a yellowish, brittle consistency like dried dough.

"What in the world——" McCarty picked up the topmost sheet to examine it more closely when Norwood's voice, fairly cracking with excitement, sounded over his ~~s~~houlder.

"Don't you see what it is? An anonymous letter, the simplest and yet most ingenious that could possibly be contrived! The words are formed by letters of the alphabet made of Italian paste, which have been glued to the paper. They are sold practically everywhere for use in soups. The wonder of it is that it has never occurred to anyone before to make use of such a method, for the ingredients are easily obtainable, and at the same time it abso-

lutely baffles any attempt to trace it. This is unique in the annals of crime!"

"It is that!" McCarty agreed soberly. "'Tis a trick that's never been tried before and an uncommon clever one. But what's he got to say for himself?—'All is known. Pay or I tell. First warning.'—Look here, sir! You've no idea what this means?"

He had turned to Oliver Jarvis and the younger man burst out passionately:

"What can it mean, except that my wife was being blackmailed? Good God! Evelyn blackmailed! Yesterday I would have knocked any man down who dared suggest such a foul thing, and now I am trying to make myself believe, to accept——" He broke off and turned away with clenched hands, only to whirl swiftly about upon them. "Understand this, though! My wife has been guilty of no wrong! Whatever it was for which she was being persecuted, whatever revelations may come of which we are ignorant now, I would stake my life upon it that my wife is an innocent victim! You knew her, Uncle Cal; you know that no secret could have weighed upon her conscience, she could have done nothing deliberately which would have placed her in a position where it would have been necessary for her to buy the silence of blackmailers!"

There was an agony of entreaty in his tones as though despite his loyal defense of the woman he loved, a doubt had arisen within him which he felt helpless to combat alone, and Calvin Norwood responded heartily:

"We know that, dear boy! Evelyn was the soul of honor and truth. No one who had ever come within range of her sweet, gentle influence could doubt that for a moment. Whatever difficulty she found herself in was not of her making, we may be sure of that. Oh, why did she not come to us frankly, when this trouble started? If

she felt some natural hesitation in approaching you, her husband, why did she not confide in me?"

"There's nothing in this that names Mrs. Jarvis herself," observed McCarty reflectively.

"But that is only the first." Norwood pointed to the box. "There are two more. Read them."

McCarty took up the second crackling sheet and read:

"Does lady forget date of next Sat. night? 5000 under rose bush yard then or all told.—Humph! he got down to business then, all right!" he commented. "There's a rose bush in your back-yard, Mr. Jarvis?"

"Yes. An old-fashioned moss rose. We brought the slip from Scotland, and planted it together——" his voice faltered.

"I've no wish to pry into your private affairs, sir," remarked McCarty after a pause. "But you said last night that Mrs. Jarvis never kept a large amount of money in the house. Five thousand dollars is quite a sum. Would she be able to lay her hands on that much at any time without consulting you about it?"

Jarvis pondered for a moment and a startled expression came over his face.

"Why, yes," he stammered at length. "That is, during the past year. I—I transferred some of her holdings to her, negotiable bonds and securities that formed a part of her inheritance from her guardian, Mr. Chartrand."

"Why did you do that?" McCarty noted his hesitation. "Did she ask it of you?"

"Yes, but I—I thought nothing of it at the time," replied Jarvis, adding hastily, "but read the last, McCarty. It is evident that my poor wife rebelled in some way at the exorbitant demand."

"Lady can and will," McCarty read slowly. "'1,000 under bush 26 each month small price safety. Will tell

all first time money not there. Final warning.' It's blackmail, all right, and it looks as though Mrs. Jarvis must have fell for it, sir, unless the feller got cold feet. You had no threatening letters yourself, I suppose, nor offers to sell you any information?"

"Certainly not! I tell you I had no possible intimation of such a thing until I came upon those boxes this morning." The earnestness in Jarvis' tone was unmistakable. "My first impulse was to destroy their contents utterly, to put them forever from my mind, but the next instant I realized that could never be. I should know no peace, night or day, until I had sifted the matter to the bottom and learned the truth."

"Did you speak of them to any of the servants? That girl, Margot, for instance?"

"No, I telephoned Mr. Terhune but, of course, I had to speak guardedly and I don't think he gathered how urgently I required his presence. I did not wait for him anyway, but came over at once to consult Mr. Norwood. I'm sure the cake must have had something to do with it, too; this cake marked 'Noel'——"

"Good-morning, gentlemen." Terhune's even tones sounded from the doorway and they turned as he entered with Inspector Druet close behind him. "Ah, McCarty, you here? Still interested in last night's little affair, I see."

The observation was none too good-natured, and the ex-Roundsman flushed.

"I'm here because Mr. Norwood asked me, sir. Good-morning, Inspector." He turned pointedly to his old superior. "Mr. Jarvis has come on something that'll surprise you here. It's a little matter of blackmail——"

"What?" The Inspector and Terhune both advanced and the latter's keen eye seized upon the evidence before

them. Taking up one of the papers, he glanced swiftly over it.

"Communications of macaroni paste!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Jarvis, what does this mean?"

Jarvis explained and the newcomers listened in silence while he told them of his discovery and showed them the crumbling Christmas cake and the three missives.

When the account was finished Inspector Druet turned again to the door with an air of finality.

"If there is anyone who knows about this affair beside the blackmailer himself, it is the maid, Margot," he announced. "I wasn't satisfied with her explanations last night, but now I am going to get the truth from her if I have to put her through the third degree. Wait here, please, all of you."

With his departure Terhune turned reprovingly to his client.

"If you had put me in possession of these facts immediately upon their discovery, Mr. Jarvis," he began, "I should have been able to handle the situation far more advantageously than now, when it is practically taken out of my hands. The obvious course will be to look into your wife's finances at the earliest possible moment, but there are other steps——"

Norwood drew McCarty aside.

"What do you make of it?" he asked anxiously. "I cannot believe that such a shadow rested upon her, and yet——"

"Wait till we hear what the girl's got to say for herself," McCarty advised, adding somewhat irrelevantly, "What's become of your secretary, sir, the young Frenchman?"

"He is somewhere about; in the museum, I fancy," Norwood replied, with a trace of obvious discomfiture.

"I don't understand Victor. He is moody, of course, and this horrible affair has been a severe shock to him, but ever since last night he has haunted the museum, I heard a noise, and came down at dawn to find him there, and twice after that I had to fairly drag him away. It is sheer morbidity, of course, but it isn't good for him in his present condition and if he doesn't keep away from there I'll confiscate his key."

Comment from McCarty was halted by the reopening of the door and Inspector Druet grimly ushered the girl, Margot, into the room. She was pale but composed and if misgiving had assailed her at the unexpected summons she gave no evidence of it as she advanced quietly.

Then all at once her glance fell upon the table and what lay there and she paused with a little choking cry.

"Ah, you have found them! I prayed that you would not, that I might keep my word to Madame, but now——"

"Now you will tell us what you know." Inspector Druet announced sternly.

The girl made a little gesture of surrender.

"Yes, Monsieur. It cannot matter now to poor Madame, and it may be, if she knows, that she would wish me to speak. I will tell all."

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE WARNINGS

“**I** HAVE known for nearly a year that Madame was in trouble,” Margot began. “Deep trouble, which grew greater as time passed, but I never dreamed that danger threatened her or I should have told Monsieur, I swear it! No one can ever know how heavenly kind Madame has been to me, how much I loved her. Madame was second only to the good God himself! After the Germans came and my home was destroyed, my parents killed before my eyes and I fled with others to England, Madame found me and was, oh! so good! She brought me to this great country with her, and I—I would have given my life for her, Messieurs! When she bade me be silent and speak to no one of the trouble which had come to her, I vowed that not a word would ever pass my lips. It is the thought that I might perhaps have saved her had I disobeyed which is tearing my heart!”

She paused with her hands clasped convulsively at her breast while the slow, heavy tears gathered in her eyes. Oliver Jarvis was staring at her as if transfixed but Inspector Druet moved impatiently, and she forced herself to continue.

“It was just two days before Christmas last year, when the box came. Not that one—” she pointed to the receptacle containing the huge cake, “but another covered with white glazed paper with gilt edges and corners, such as confectioners use, only there was no name upon it nor card

within. It arrived late in the afternoon, I remember, when Madame, worn out with the last of her Christmas shopping, was having tea alone in her own sitting-room. Henri called me and placed the box on my hands and I took it to Madame. Many gifts had arrived during the day and believing it to be just another like the rest, Madame opened it.

"The cake was very beautiful then, Messieurs, snowy and fresh and imposing; it appeared fit for a fête, a banquet, and I exclaimed over it until some—how do you say!—some intuition born of Madame's lack of response made me glance at her face. Mon Dieu! I shall never forget her nor the horror in her eyes as she sat there in her low chair staring at the innocent cake upon the table before her as though it were some monster! For a long time she did not speak and then when her voice came it was so changed that I scarcely recognized it as hers.

"'Where did this come from, Margot?' she asked of me. 'There may be some mistake. Go to Henri and find out how it came here.'

"But Henri could only tell me that a messenger—a young boy, not in uniform—had brought it and had said quite distinctly that it was for Meeses Oliver Jarvis. Henri had signed no receipt and the boy had gone instantly away without waiting.

"When I returned to Madame's sitting-room to tell her I found that she had torn the box all apart in her search for some name, some message, but none was there. For a long time she did not speak and I waited, not knowing what to do for it seemed that Madame was almost in a trance. At last she roused herself and said:

"'Margot, find another box and we will put the cake away. It is just a—a joke which someone has played on me, but Monsieur must know nothing about it. Do you understand? Do not mention it to Henri again or to any

of the other servants. Not a word of this must reach Monsieur's ears."

As the girl paused Jarvis wrenched his eyes from her face as though with a visible effort and turning, walked abruptly to the window where he stood with his back to the others, staring out unseeingly at the driving downpour of rain.

Margot gazed after him with a sort of dumb appeal, as if mutely imploring pardon for the pain she was inflicting upon him, but he was oblivious to her glance and sighing, she resumed:

"I took this box which you see here—and which had come but that morning with a purchase of Madame's—placed the cake in it and put it away as she directed, in a corner of the highest shelf in the closet in her dressing-room. Madame did not speak of it again, but from that moment a change came upon her. I, watching her, could see it as no one else could. Through all the holiday entertainments she was feverishly gay, but it was as if the heart had gone out of her, and often when I came with her coffee in the morning, I knew that she had not slept. I did not comprehend why the mere gift of the cake should have so changed Madame, but as time went on it grew more marked. Only in the presence of Monsieur was Madame like her old self, but when she was alone with me one could see the effort it cost her.

"She never disturbed the cake but many times I have seen her eyes straying to that closet and it seemed always that she listened and waited. Once, about two months after its arrival I ventured to ask Madame if I should not throw the cake away, pretending to come upon it in the closet as though I had only then remembered it, but she ordered me quite sharply not to touch it nor refer to it again and I obeyed.

“Another month passed and Madame was at last recovering her spirits and forgetting, I think, the shock of whatever that strange gift had meant, when just after Easter it came; the first of those letters mystérieux! It was not in an envelope but had been slipped between two squares of cardboard and wrapped in plain brown paper, with no name or address upon it. One night at ten o'clock as I sat mending and waiting for Madame to return from a dinner, Etta, the housemaid, brought it to me. She had been out for the evening and said that when she reached the basement vestibule she found a man waiting there in the darkness. He told her he had rung the bell but no one responded; that he had been sent to deliver the packet to Meeses Jarvis, and he placed it in her hands. Etta brought it to me and I did not tell her that the man had lied, but he had not rung the bell.

“I felt a sad misgiving but I dared not keep the packet from Madame and when she returned I gave it to her. She grew very white, but said no word as she tore the paper, lifted a square of cardboard and glanced beneath it. The next instant she fell in a crumpled heap to the floor. She had fainted.

“I called no one, though I was very frightened, for I knew Madame would not want anyone to be told. I did not pry, Messieurs, but as I worked over her I could not avoid seeing the paper which lay beside her on the floor, nor reading those words of macaroni paste letters. When Madame opened her eyes at last and looked into mine she saw that I knew.

“She told me then that she was in trouble, that there was something which she could not explain to me, but Monsieur must never, never know. If any more messages I must bring them straight to her, and I must give promise that I would not allow one word of it to

pass my lips to any living person. I took a solemn oath, Messieurs, and I would not have broken it had not my poor Madame come so terribly to her death."

"When did the second message come, and how, Margot?" Jarvis' strained voice sounded from the window as he turned and came slowly forward once more.

"Monsieur, you gave it to Madame yourself," the girl responded quietly.

"I!"

"But yes, Monsieur. You and Madame had been motor-ing together one afternoon about a month later. It was just after Madame had been so ill, if you remember. The doctor said it was a breakdown of the nerves, but me, I knew it was anxiety which was eating her strength away——"

"Go on!" he ordered, hoarsely, as she hesitated.

"Madame preceded you into the house, Monsieur, and you followed to her room while I was removing her cloak, and handed her the packet. She turned pale, so pale that I feared she would faint again and the marks were on my arm for days where she clung to me to steady herself, to keep from collapsing in your presence——"

"Good heavens! I do recall it!" Jarvis exclaimed. "I stopped to give some directions to the chauffeur and my wife went on into the house. When I turned to the steps, a boy standing there touched his cap and handed a small flat package to me, saying that the lady had dropped it. I gave him some loose change and he scampered off."

Margot nodded.

"That is just what you told Madame; I remember, because it was necessary for me to repeat it to her later. She was too stunned, at the moment, to comprehend. When you left the room, Monsieur, she opened and read the message and then locked it away in her desk. I saw only

that it was made of macaroni paste, like the first, but not what words the letters formed.

"I feared Madame would be ill again but in the morning she was stronger and in the days that followed she seemed more cheerful and almost gay. Two weeks passed, and then one morning Madame came here to see Mademoiselle Joan, through the little door in the wall. When she returned I saw the old hunted look in her eyes and in her hand she held a packet like the others. It had been tossed over the wall at her feet as she came back through the garden."

"Over the wall!" repeated Jarvis. "Then the people next door——"

"They had gone away for the summer, Monsieur," Margot interrupted quietly. "The house was closed and boarded up. You and Madame were planning then to go to Maine——"

"I remember. That was early in June. But my wife changed her mind suddenly and refused to leave the city; she insisted on remaining here all during the hot weather in spite of my remonstrance, doing war work——" Jarvis paused with a groan and his eyes fell again upon the letters on the table. "I understand, now! That wretched money had to be under the rose bush on the twenty-sixth of every month; she dared not go away! Oh, my poor girl, if she had only told me the truth! I would have forgiven anything! Had there been murder itself on her hands, she was my wife and I would have defended her against all the world!"

"I know nothing of any money, Monsieur, save that demand for it in the first letter," Margot said. "I do not know whether Madame paid any or not; she took me no further into her confidence. But no more letters came that I heard of after that third one and in the early autumn, as you know, Monsieur, Madame began talking of going

to France. I thought Madame had destroyed the letters until one day, a short time ago, I came upon a second box, sealed, beside the one which contained the cake upon the shelf. I did not dare speak of it to Madame; indeed I did not want to! She was so happy at the prospect of leaving America that I had no desire to recall her trouble which I believed was safely past. And then, only last Wednesday night, it descended upon her again." →

"Last Wednesday!" Calvin Norwood repeated, aghast.

"But that was the night of your little dinner, Oliver! The evening was a great success and I have never seen Evelyn in better spirits! What could have happened then?"

"Was it another letter?" demanded Jarvis. "Did anyone try to see her, any intruder?"

"I do not know, Monsieur. I saw no letter, no one. I only know that when it was all over and the guests departed, I went to Madame's room to arrange her for the night and found her huddled upon the hearth before the little grate fire in her sitting-room in a worse state of collapse than I had ever seen her. She did not hear me when I spoke to her, did not seem to know me when I touched her, and the face she lifted to mine was like the face of one already dead; all but her eyes! They were bright and gleaming with a—a terrible light in them! Mon Dieu! But I was frightened! It was your knock upon her door that aroused her, Monsieur. She replied to you quietly enough——"

"I remember!" Jarvis murmured brokenly. "She told me that she had a headache and had just taken a sleeping powder and I bade her 'good-night' without disturbing her. If I had only known!"

Margot shook her head sadly.

"Madame had taken no powder. I got her to bed at last, but I dared not leave her. She never knew that I rested all night on the couch in her sitting-room and many

times I rose and went in to her. She was lying staring straight up at the ceiling and that terrible look never left her face until just at dawn, when sleep came to her at last. I sat beside her then, watching, and once she started up with a wild cry but my hand upon her arm quieted her, and she slept again."

"Did she say anything when she started up like that?" asked Inspector Druet suddenly. "Was it just a cry or could you distinguish any words?"

"I think, but I cannot be sure, Monsieur, that she cried out something about 'letters.' It returned later to my mind and I wondered if she could have meant those three strange messages which had caused her so much suffering and which I had hoped were forgotten. In the morning I crept away to my room, fearful to have Madame find me there when she wakened, lest she think I had been spying upon her. She slept late but when she rang for her coffee the gentle, sane look had returned to her eyes, only behind it lay the deep trouble which she could not hide from me. And it never left her! She tried to deceive me; even yesterday when she pleaded a headache, she was so bright, so feverishly animated that I felt it was not true. That is why, when she did not ring for me and I found her gone I was almost mad with anxiety! I feared in my heart that harm had come to her because of this secret trouble, this black-mailer, and as the hours lengthened and she did not return I was beside myself! The house stifled me and I went into the garden where Monsieur came upon me. The instant I saw his face I knew that the trouble which had been hanging over Madame for so long had come at last!"

"Margot, you are keeping something back!" Inspector Druet advanced sternly. "Why haven't you told us the whole truth?"

"But I have, Monsieur, I swear——"

"Don't lie, girl! Your mistress was killed in her own dressing-room, strangled to death after a struggle which practically wrecked the room! And her death occurred before six o'clock last night; we have the Medical Examiner's word for that."

"There is some mistake, Monsieur." Margot eyed him calmly. "When I went to Madame's rooms at half-past six she had gone, but all was in order. The dressing-room was undisturbed."

"Do you realize, my girl, that in persisting in such a story you are drawing suspicion upon yourself? The room was ransacked, your mistress killed and her body removed from the house, and you are still attempting to claim that the room was in order immediately thereafter, when we ourselves found it later bearing unmistakable signs of the struggle that had taken place!"

"I claim it only because it is the truth, Monsieur," Margot reiterated. "Why should I lie about a thing which must certainly have been discovered? Had I not many hours before you came in which to put the room in order if I desired to conceal the fact that a—a struggle, such as you say, had taken place there? I swear that all was as usual when I entered at half-past six and again an hour later when I laid out Madame's garments for the night, and took the lingerie and work down to the basement dining-room to mend. If, when you came, you found the room ransacked I know nothing of it. I did not leave the basement again until I went into the garden."

The girl spoke with respectful repression but her voice quivered, an angry light darted from her eyes and in each pallid cheek a small, scarlet spot burned.

Inspector Druet shrugged and motioned toward the door.

"Very well, my girl, if that's the line you mean to take, we are wasting time here. I want you to come with me."

"I am under arrest, Monsieur?" She drew herself up proudly.

"Not yet," the Inspector retorted significantly. "You're coming back to the other house and see for yourself how useless it is for you to persist in your lies. You've told us half the truth; you'd better come across with the rest or it will be the worse for you."

Margot bowed her head.

"I will be ready, Monsieur." Then all at once she looked full and steadily into his eyes. "But I have not lied! I have told the truth—all, all the truth. I swear it on Madame's memory!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE RETURN OF JOAN NORWOOD

AT Inspector Druet's suggestion Oliver Jarvis accompanied him and the maid back to his own house. Terhune, murmuring something about the interests of his client, prepared to follow and Norwood turned to McCarty.

"Don't you want to come, also? I am going whether the Inspector desires my presence or not. I am Oliver's closest friend and I do not propose to be barred from this investigation by any jealousy on the part of the police. I'll show them yet that my life-long study of crime is of more value than their haphazard, bull-doing methods! How about it, Mr. McCarty?"

"Thanks, sir, but I'll not be going over there again. 'Tis different with me, and being as I've left the force I don't want to get in Dutch with the Inspector by butting in. If you don't mind, I'll wait here for you. There are one or two little points sticking in my mind and I'd like to look over the ground again."

"The museum? Go as far as you like," responded his host affably. "Victor will unlock the door for you if he's not there already. But don't leave till I return; I want to talk this all over with you."

Left alone, McCarty, approached the table where the blind secretary's typewriter stood and selecting a page or two at random from the scattered notes examined them.

The subject-matter was unintelligibly scientific to him but the typing itself was as precise and cleancut as though the young man's sight were unimpaired. A book printed in the Braille system for the blind lay open beside the machine; it was in some foreign language, presumably French; but the spacing of the lines denoted poetry, and McCarty whistled softly to himself as he replaced it.

Leaving the library he made his way down the hall, treading as lightly as his solid weight permitted. The museum door stood ajar and through the narrow aperture he could see a man's form bent over a case in the far corner between the fireplace and the window. Tiptoeing, McCarty had reached the threshold before the figure turned revealing the thin, keenly sensitive countenance of Captain Marchal.

"Who is it?" he asked in a high strained voice.

"'Tis me, Captain; Timothy McCarty, that had dinner here last night with Mr. Norwood and yourself."

The Frenchman bowed gravely.

"You will forgive my surprise, Monsieur McCarty. I did not hear you enter." His tone was unfailingly courteous but there was a shade of hauteur in his bearing as though he resented the intrusion upon his solitude.

"I've been having a little talk with Mr. Norwood and the rest of them in the library but they've all gone over to Mr. Jarvis' house now, and Mr. Norwood told me I could look about a bit in here," McCarty explained.

"Here?" The secretary raised his eyebrows. "You will find nothing more here, Monsieur, to be of use in solving this most terrible affair. Were you not with the others last night? Do you not know that the crime was committed in Madame Jarvis' own home?"

He spoke with an eagerness which made McCarty's eyes narrow speculatively but the latter replied in bland nonchalance.

"Still, 'twas here we found the body and I thought I'd have a look at that window by daylight, but if I'm disturbing you, Captain——?"

"Not at all, Monsieur." The secretary closed the case with a snap. "I was but rearranging some fingerprint records. If I can be of any assistance to you——"

"Fingerprints!" McCarty interrupted. "I didn't know Mr. Norwood collected them, too!"

"He has here everything pertaining to the identification of criminals and the investigation of crime." Captain Marchal pointed toward a distant corner. "You see those astronomical instruments and charts upon that stand? With them Monsieur Norwood can calculate what autumn day corresponded in luminosity at dusk with a certain day in spring and in this way he can study if necessary the scene of a crime in autumn in order to discover if this or that could be seen at a certain day in spring."

"Can he, now?" McCarty rubbed his chin. "Have they not enough evidence on the earth to help them find a crook, without dragging in the heavens, too? Many's the time I've looked through a telescope at a nickel a throw on the Island, but devil a thing could I see, though once 'twas because I had my hat hung on the end of it. Mr. Norwood will be beating Terhune yet at his own game. Howsomever, 'tis fingerprints I'm asking after, Captain Marchal. Is it only criminals he's kept a record of?"

The secretary shook his head with a trace of impatience.

"No; at one time I believe Monsieur Norwood had a *toquade*, a hobby of collecting those of his friends also, but he is now more interested in handwriting specimens. Perhaps, Monsieur, you would desire to have me show to you——?"

He turned suggestively toward another case, but McCarty held his ground:

"No, Captain; it's the fingerprints I'd like to see. Has he a record of Mrs. Jarvis', by any chance?"

"It is possible, Monsieur; I do not know." The secretary shrugged. "Of the many impressions which Monsieur Norwood took he has retained comparatively few for his collection and I have not yet started to catalogue them."

He opened the spring lock of the fingerprint case with a small key which he carried and stepped aside.

"Voilà, Monsieur. You will perhaps desire to look them over for yourself. I have no data concerning them so I cannot be of assistance, but if there is anything else in which I can aid your search you will find me in the library."

He bowed and departed, but McCarty spent little time over the case in which he had evinced such interest. He fingered a few of the slides and molds tentatively, then closed the case and tiptoeing to the door, examined the lock with minute care. Upon its surface about the keyhole a few very fine angular scratches caught his eye and he nodded to himself in satisfaction. The seemingly untenable thought which had presented itself to him during his talk with the butler on the way to the house was strengthening in probability with each point gained, yet he would have hesitated to lay it before anyone else for serious consideration, so preposterous would it have appeared.

A glance from the window showed him that the ladder still remained propped against the ledge as it had been left the night before, and leaving the museum he descended the back stairs to the passageway leading to the yard.

Viewed through the slanting curtain of rain the ladder seemed even more frail and insecure than it had previously as it trembled and creaked in each gust of wind. Umbrellaless, McCarty turned up his coat collar and advancing, shook

the light support speculatively. Then, heedless of the down-pour he paused and gazed about him.

A few small branches detached by the storm lay beneath the sprinkling group of stunted trees, but otherwise the yard was immaculate.

Beneath the porch formed by the jutting museum extension a burlap sack and an orderly row of small wooden boxes met his eye, flanked by a small heap of loose bricks, and behind, in the kitchen window a tall, gaunt, female form could be discerned peering curiously at him from between the curtains but McCarty gave small heed to it. The concrete floor of the porch was sunk a foot or two below the level of the yard and clambering down he examined the burlap sack. It was almost empty but a few potatoes still weighed its end and McCarty dumped them unceremoniously into a box and began refilling the sack with bricks from the pile beside him.

When it was half full, he twisted the top, slung it over his shoulder with a mighty heave and scrambling up to the path once more started for the ladder.

The curtains at the kitchen window parted and the woman watched with bulging eyes as he clumsily essayed the first round of the ladder. It creaked ominously and its slender rungs, slippery from the rain, afforded but precarious hold for his square-toed, generous-soled boots, but he plodded upward doggedly.

The ladder trembled and swayed, its lower end held fast in the soft, glutinous mud but its top grated alarmingly as the center sagged beneath the unprecedented weight placed upon it. Perspiration mingled with the raindrops on McCarty's brow and he tested the rung above apprehensively with each upward step.

The sill of the museum window was within reach when

the bending supports of the ladder emitted a warning crack and McCarty with a quick swing of his shoulder dropped the bag of bricks with a squelching thud and crash into the mud below. The sudden release from weight made the light ladder rebound so swiftly that the climber was almost jarred from his place, but he held on tenaciously. It had been a close call, but he had pushed his experiment to the limit of safety and for a moment he clung there gazing down with immense satisfaction at the bricks tumbling in all directions from the burst bag.

He had proved his theory, even though he had all but broken his neck in the effort and his purpose was achieved.

Gingerly he felt his backward way down once more and as his feet found the solid ground at last he heard the voice of his host, Calvin Norwood, from just behind him:

"Well, McCarty, upon my soul!"

"Yes, sir." McCarty turned hastily. "I near broke your ladder."

There was more satisfaction than regret in his tones and Norwood peering at him from beneath his umbrella remarked drily:

"So I observe. Why on earth were you carrying a load of bricks up to the museum?"

"'Twas just a bit of an experiment, sir," McCarty explained. "A fine mess I've made of your yard with the bricks, too! I'd no notion the bag would burst so easy!"

"Well, never mind. Come into the house and let us have a talk." At arm's length Norwood held the umbrella over his dripping guest and drew him into the passageway. "You will be the better for a drop of something, too, man; you're soaked to the skin!"

McCarty was nothing loath and in a few minutes he was seated with his host before the cracking library fire, a steam-

ing glass at his elbow and a fragrant cigar poised at an argumentative angle between his lips.

“What do I think of the Inspector?” he repeated in response to a query just voiced by the other. “He’s the best man on the force to-day, sir. There’s not much gets by him, though to them that don’t understand his way of getting results he might seem a trifle bull-headed. I worked under him on many a case and it’s seldom he falls down.”

“Bull-headed’!” Norwood repeated in his turn. “I should say he was! It has never before been my privilege to watch the inner workings of the police force from the inception of a case, but I must admit I am disappointed. These sledgehammer methods of Inspector Druet are certainly not getting him anywhere now; for all his bullying, Margot is sticking steadfastly to her statement that Mrs. Jarvis’ dressing-room was undisturbed at eight o’clock last night and her manner is so convincing that if I had not seen the state it was in later with my own eyes, I declare I would be inclined to believe her.”

“They’ve found nothing else, sir, in the dead lady’s rooms?” asked McCarty after a meditative pause.

“Nothing. I don’t know what use the Inspector has made of the glove you gave him last night—the one your friend found on the top of the ladder—but I don’t believe it will prove of any value in the investigation.”

“No, sir?” McCarty’s tone was a question and as the other did not reply he went on: “ ’Tis an expensive one, of foreign make, and it might be easy traced to the shop that sold it.”

“But think of the number of men who walk into a shop, buy a pair or two of gloves and take them away with them,” Norwood objected. “There would be no possible way of tracing them unless they were regular customers, and then that glove, although originally good, was so worn and

soiled that it may have been kicking around some garage for weeks and changed hands many times. For some reason, Inspector Druet had turned his attention when I left from Margot to the housemaid, Etta, but bullying won't have any effect on that girl."

"Etta?" McCarty bent forward suddenly, both hands outspread upon his knees. "The one that had her face tied up, that was sick all yesterday?"

Norwood nodded.

"There's no sign of her toothache this morning, but when the servants over there were told the truth—they had to be, of course, when the body was brought home—she collapsed. Everyone who came in contact with Mrs. Jarvis loved her, you know, and though this girl had given her a good deal of trouble, she seems after all to have worshiped her mistress, like the rest."

"What kind of trouble?" McCarty asked quickly.

"Well, she was insubordinate, and hot-tempered and sullen by turns. I've heard Mrs. Jarvis speak of her difficulties with her to my niece, Joan. I don't think she would have kept the girl in her service but for the fact of her relationship to the cook. She had to let Dick go."

"Who is Dick?"

"Etta's brother. Oliver employed him for a time as second man, but he was utterly no good; lazy, impudent, drank up everything he could lay his hand on and drove old Henry nearly crazy. Oliver told me he was surprised and touched this morning at the grief Etta displayed, but it evidently hasn't modified her temper. Inspector Druet tried to cross-examine her about yesterday, making her repeat what she told us all last night and she flared up at him like a spitfire and then refused point blank to answer another question." Norwood chuckled. "He'll have his hands full with her."

"Mrs. Jarvis knew your friend Professor Parlowe, didn't she?" McCarty remarked somewhat irrelevantly.

"Yes. It was she who brought me his invitation to join him in his experiment yesterday," the other responded. "I was engaged when she dropped in on Tuesday afternoon to tell me of it, but she spoke of it particularly on Wednesday evening after her dinner party. She was always so interested, poor dear child, in whatever interested her friends. That was one of her greatest charms."

McCarty removed his cigar and knocked the ash off carefully on the hearth.

"Mr. Norwood, who was present at that dinner?"

"Let me see. It was just a small, informal affair, you know. Beside Oliver, his wife and myself there were the Blakes, the Gardners, Mrs. Hilton and the Fowlers, all intimate members of their circle."

"Who are they; those people?" persisted McCarty. "What are they like?"

"The Blakes are a bridal couple; he's off to the front in a fortnight." Norwood explained indulgently. "The Gardners are elderly; they were friends of Oliver's family. Mrs. Hilton is a young widow, and the Fowlers are the powder-works people. All quite above suspicion in this affair, McCarty, I assure you."

"What did they talk about, during the dinner?" McCarty accepted the final observation with a nod. "You remember, sir, 'twas just after you'd all gone that Mrs. Jarvis herself went to pieces, if that girl Margot is telling the truth. If she'd no warning from outside and nobody else got to her, there must have been something said that brought her trouble back to her again; something to do with that matter of blackmail."

"That is quite impossible!" Norwood declared. "The conversation was of the most general character, as I remem-

ber it, and it could not have had the most remote bearing on whatever this secret trouble is which was preying on the poor young woman's mind. She seemed as cheerful and happy——”

He broke off and McCarty, watching him, saw a shadow cross the older man's face.

“Was she so?” he asked. “Didn't her manner change at all during the evening, Mr. Norwood? Was she just as gay at the end as she was when the dinner started?”

“No; I can't say that she was,” the other admitted. “It did occur to me that she grew very quiet all of a sudden; not sad nor troubled but just silent and abstracted. It was during dinner, but I cannot remember what the subject under discussion was at the moment. It could only have been some pleasant triviality. Whatever caused Mrs. Jarvis' change of mood was merely passing, for she quite recovered her spirits before the evening was over.”

“Before I played the fool with that ladder awhile ago, I was talking to Captain Marchal in the museum.” McCarty lowered his voice and glanced cautiously about him but the secretary had not been in evidence since their return to the house. “He tells me that you once made quite a collection of your friends' fingerprints. Did you ever by any chance, sir, take an impression of Mrs. Jarvis'?”

“Why, yes.” Norwood glanced up in surprise. “I didn't keep the slide, of course, but the enlarged photograph of it is there with the rest. What do you want it for?”

“Oh, I just thought I'd like to see it,” McCarty responded diffidently.

“Didn't Victor show it to you?” Norwood arose. “Come, then, and I will. I collected scores but kept just twenty-five aside from those of interest from a criminological standpoint. I remember distinctly the occasion on which I

obtained Mrs. Jarvis' fingerprints; she didn't want me to take them for some inexplicable reason, and her husband teased her unmercifully about it."

As he spoke, he had led the way down the hall to the museum and McCarty asked:

"When was this, Mr. Norwood?"

"Oh, about four years ago; just after their return from abroad. Here are the photographs. As you see, each one is plainly marked on the back——"

He shuffled through the handful of prints which he took from the case McCarty had previously examined and the latter waited expectantly, but his host shook his head.

"This is very odd. Mrs. Jarvis' prints are missing, and they are the only ones that have been mislaid. I told you I had twenty-five such records; there are only twenty-four here, and hers are not among them." He eyed his companion in bewilderment. "I—I don't know what to make of it!"

"Maybe 'tis in some other part of the case, mixed up with those slides," suggested McCarty. There was a curious tenseness in his manner.

"No; it is not here, anywhere. Really this is most extraordinary! I was showing it, together with the others to Professor Parlowe only the other day. I must ask Victor at once——"

"Uncle Call! I've come home!"

At the sound of the fresh, clear, young voice incongruously joyous in that room where tragedy and death had stalked but a few short hours before, both men turned to the doorway.

On the threshold there appeared a pretty, fair-haired girl, her blue eyes dancing with mischievous delight, her hands extended for the welcome she knew would greet her. Just behind her stood a tall, broad-shouldered masculine

figure, with hair as light as hers and a small blonde mustache lifted in a half smile.

"Joan!" Norwood's voice was hushed but filled with emotion as he advanced to the girl. "My dear, what brought you home? You—you cannot have received my letter so soon!"

"I haven't had a line from you in days, but I wanted to surprise you!" She faltered and with a little gesture drew her companion forward. "Uncle Cal, I've something to tell you, and, oh! I want you to be happy about it, because I am!"

"Then you don't know? You haven't heard?" Norwood stammered, ignoring in his troubled preoccupation the significance of her words. "My poor child——"

"I haven't heard anything!" The gay, heedlessly joyous tones interrupted him. "But just wait till you hear my news! Uncle Cal, this is Eric Vivaseur, and though you've never met him before I know you are going to be very good to him because I—I have promised to be his wife!"

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND GLOVE

“’T WAS a fine time to be springing a fiancé on the old man!” commented Dennis Riordan, as the glowing embers from his pipe sizzled on the still wet pavement. “This is his unlucky week for fair; a murdered body found in his museum, and a man with a name like a dime novel tacked on to the family. How did he take it?”

“Dazed, like,” McCarty responded. “He shook hands, but his mind was not on it, and whilst I was trying to make a getaway without being noticed, the young lady came out of her happy trance and saw there was something wrong. ‘What is it, Uncle Cal?’ she asked in a kind of a frightened whisper.

“‘Come into the library, both of you,’ Norwood said. ‘McCarty——’

“‘I’m going, sir,’ I told him. ‘I’ll look in on you later.’ And I beat it, the young man staring after me in a vacant sort of a way and well he might! From the reception he got he must have thought he was in a bughouse family.”

It was late afternoon and a pale, watery sun had struggled through the clouds. McCarty had been unable longer to resist the lure of friendly confab and he and Dennis stood just within the door of Engine House 023 while he took a last regretful pull at his cigar stump and then flung it into the gutter. As they turned to climb the stairs to Dennis’ quarters above, the latter exclaimed:

“By the powers! Is it tramping across country you’ve

been, on a day like this? Your boots are an inch thick with mud!"

"Are they so?" inquired McCarty with dignity. "I must have got it in the Norwood yard this noon when I was fooling around with the ladder."

"The ladder? And what were you doing with it?"

"Carrying a load of loose brick up to the museum window," responded the other, adding in immense satisfaction, "I figured my own weight and I added the bricks by guess, in what our friend Terhune would have called a scientific experiment, and the ladder all but broke under it, just as I thought it would."

Dennis nodded comprehendingly.

"If you'd asked me, I could have told you without your risking your neck and your new suit that that ladder never bore the weight of two people at once, and one of them dead, last night," he observed. "In spite of Terhune's theory and the lock of black hair caught on the window frame, Mrs. Jarvis' body was never brought in that way."

"I'm not so sure," McCarty retorted enigmatically. "But there's a lot of things in this case that contradict each other flat, and it's what them that's most concerned haven't done and said, more than what we've got out of them, that makes it such a puzzle. Do you mind the way I used to work backward, now and again when I was on the force? That's the way I'd tackle this case, now, if I had the handling of it."

"It looks to me as if they'd said altogether too much," Dennis demurred. "A pack of lies, I'd call most of it. Why is this girl Margot sticking to it that the dressing-room was in order at eight o'clock when at twelve we found it looking as if the German army had been through it?"

"For a simple reason that hasn't struck the Inspector nor yet Terhune; she may be telling the God's truth,"

returned McCarty dryly. "There's a lot can happen between eight and twelve."

"For the love of Pete!" Dennis' eyes bulged. "Do you mean that the poor lady wasn't killed at all when we thought? That maybe it all happened whilst we were sitting there in the dining-room at Mr. Norwood's, talking so grand and scientific about crime, and that poor thing being laid out under the very roof——"

"Hold yourself, Denny," interrupted his companion. "I didn't say that. 'Twas the state of the dressing-room I was remarking on. Mrs. Jarvis, dead or alive, might have been gone from it and it still be in order at eight o'clock. The attempt at robbery, or the upsetting of the room to make it look like robbery, could have taken place any time between then and half-past ten, when the cook and the butler came home."

"You think somebody put up a game? That there was no robbery at all?" Dennis' tone was awestruck.

"I don't know what to think about it," McCarty replied frankly. "There were the two girls, one upstairs in bed, the other sewing in the basement; that is, if you can believe them. It's not likely that one or the other would hear nothing, though 'tis a solidly built old house, with the walls a foot thick. Of the two of them, the one upstairs stood the best chance of hearing what went on, being nearest, but whatever they know, they're keeping quiet."

"Mac, what were you getting at when you said that Mrs. Jarvis might have been gone from that room dead or alive? You don't mean she walked out of it? That she wasn't killed there, but maybe over in the other house, after all?"

"Corpses don't dress themselves," retorted McCarty. "If you remember, Denny, when we found the body in the museum, it was dressed in a dark purple silk, and the

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scarf that had choked the breath out of her was blue. Margot told us about getting Mrs. Jarvis undressed and into that wrapper thing before she left her in the afternoon and we all saw it there in the bedroom later. Is it likely that Mrs. Jarvis laying down with a sick headache and hearing a burglar fumbling around in the next room would have waited to dress herself again before investigating, or would the burglar after he'd killed her have gone to the trouble? There's another thing, too. What was Margot doing in the back-yard late at night when we surprised her?"

"Getting the air, she said," observed Dennis. "She was worrying about Mrs. Jarvis——"

"Then why wasn't she waiting for her by the front door, if she expected her to come home that way from the dinner party?" demanded the other. "Why was she skulking in the yard unless she knew or suspected that her mistress had gone over to the other house?"

"Then she's in on the whole deal, the blackmail and all?" Dennis cried. "What has it all to do with Norwood and his house?"

"That's what we've got to find out. It's my opinion that when the girl discovered her mistress gone, she looked to see what clothes were missing so as to tell what she had worn. Well she knew Mrs. Jarvis would not go out to dinner in that plain little dress and as she was nowhere in the house, Margot must have figured that the only place she could have gone with no coat or hat was through the little door in the fence to the Norwoods."

"But why?" Dennis shook his head dubiously. "Why should she lie to the maid and sneak over there like a thief when she'd been used to running in and out at all hours with never a question?"

McCarty shrugged.

"Ask me another," he invited. "Why did she get rid

of all her own servants for the afternoon except the one that was sick, and even invent an errand for Margot? / Why was she so anxious that Mr. Norwood should go to his friend Professor Parlowe at that particular time? I'd not be surprised to hear it was she suggested to him to let his own butler off to see his brother, that's in the hospital."

Dennis rose from the side of his cot upon which he had perched himself and his voice shook with suppressed excitement.

"The secretary; that Frenchman! She didn't try to get him out of the way!" he exclaimed. "Mac, do you think they had a date over there at Norwood's? He couldn't have killed her! It would have taken more nerve than he's got, blind as he is, for him to have walked in that room with us after, and stood around waiting for us to discover the body! Though at that, if you remember, he didn't want to go with us, only old Norwood insisted and told him to his face that he'd not been like himself all evening! Do you suppose——"

"I don't suppose anything," McCarty observed. "I'm trying to get at the facts. If she did go over to the Norwood house for any private reason the secretary may have had nothing to do with it and him being blind may never even have known she was there."

"Then she went to meet someone else, that's a cinch," Dennis grasped at another straw. "I thought last night that nobody but a crazy loon would murder a woman and then cart her body from one house to the next for no earthly reason before making his own getaway. But look here, Mac; if she was murdered in the Norwood house, who was it got in her dressing-room later? Maybe she was killed for something the murderer thought she would have on her and not finding it, he took a desp'rate chance and went over and burgled her house!"

"And what would he be after?" McCarty asked in withering scorn. "That stale Christmas cake or the macaroni-paste letters? Would the fellow be thinking that she carried them around with her, that he decoyed her to the Norwood house and murdered her for them?"

"Maybe 'twas for something else, entirely; something that he did find, after, in her dressing-room," suggested Dennis, brightly. "What does the Inspector and Mr. Terhune say about it?"

"I've had no speech with either of them, barring a little note that I found at my rooms this afternoon, asking me to call at Mr. Terhune's to-night." McCarty paused, and added carelessly, "I'll have to send my regrets, I'm thinking; I've got another date, with a lady."

For a full minute Dennis stared at his friend, then shook his head lugubriously.

"Well, they say there's none like the old ones," he observed cryptically. "I'm surprised at you, though, Mac. To begin sparking and holding hands at your time of life——"

"I'm holding no hands!" interrupted McCarty in haste. "'Tis only the movies I'm taking her to; by the grace of God it's too late in the year, or I'd be let in for a trip to Coney."

Native delicacy struggled with curiosity for a moment and then Dennis asked:

"And who is your lady friend, if it's not too private a matter?"

McCarty grinned.

"It's Miss Etta Barney."

Dennis greeted the announcement blankly but in the pause that ensued a light broke over him.

"Etta!" he exclaimed. "The Jarvis' housemaid! Well I knew you'd something up your sleeve, but a fine couple you'll be, and her with her face out like a balloon——"

"Barring its natural shape, her face is all right," announced McCarty. "'Twas so covered with bandages last night that you couldn't tell whether it was swollen or not but to-day you'd never believe there'd been a thing the matter with her. 'Tis the quickest toothache cure that ever I see."

"You're thinking maybe she faked it?" Dennis chuckled. "What would you with your blarney be finding out that the inspector couldn't?"

"There's more ways than one of killing a pig!" retorted McCarty inelegantly. "He tried bullying her and got nothing but a flare-up of temper for his pains. Of course, she may know nothing but I thought it was worth a chance, so after I left Mr. Norwood's this morning I walked around the block to the Jarvis house and rang the basement bell. Etta answered the door and she was suspicious and fighting mad at first but I kidded her along; told her what a brute the Inspector was and not to mind him, that I had no connection with the force and that I'd liked her spirit, and the way she stood up to him and—aw, well, the upshot of it is, she's going to the movies with me to-night."

"And a dance she'll lead you, my bold Don John!" predicted his companion. "If she knows anything, it'll take more than a Saturday night movie to get it out of her!"

"I'll find out, if it means keeping steady company!" McCarty declared. "After I'd made the date with her I went and got some lunch and then strolled back to the Norwood house. The Inspector had left for headquarters but young Mr. Jarvis was on hand and Terhune, too. Miss Joan had taken to her bed; sick with the shock of hearing of her friend's death, but the fiancé, Vivaseur, was still there and 'twas wonderful the way they'd all cottoned to him, even Terhune; he'd made a regular hit with him,

seemed to know all about his past cases and Terhune was purring like a pet cat."

"What sort of a fellow is this Vivaseur?" asked Dennis.

"He's British, but you'd not hold it against him in spite of his blonde little dab of a mustache; a fine figure of a man, though older than I thought when first I saw him; with a florid kind of a color to him and not as slim as a youngster. He's got the manners of a gentleman, however, and a way with women as you could see with half an eye."

"Why is he here philandering, instead of doing his bit?" Dennis demanded coldly.

"He's done it; got a scar right across his forehead from shrapnel and some kind of a hurt inside that put him out of the fighting game for good," he says. McCarty paused and added: "I've not got the number yet of that secretary, Captain Marchal. Of course, the murder was a shock to him in his condition but he's not taking it naturally. He acts like he was waiting every minute for something to drop. He jumped when I came on him in the museum this morning and whenever Mr. Vivaseur spoke to him later on in the library he edged off. If there's anything on his mind——"

"Hey, Denny!" The voice of Mike, fellow member of the engine company, sounded from below. "Is Mac up there with you?"

"He is that!" Dennis responded.

"Well, tell him to come down. He's wanted by the police!"

A chuckle accompanied the sally, but McCarty wasted no time in descending, with Dennis at his heels. In the doorway, chatting with the lieutenant, stood Inspector Druet.

"I thought I should find you here, Mac," the latter

remarked. "How are you, Riordan? Have you two been busy solving last night's little affair?"

He spoke in bantering good humor, but McCarty noted the lines of worry and fatigue in his former superior's face and advanced quickly to him.

"I was wishful to have a talk with you, sir. Would you like to step around to my rooms?"

The Inspector nodded and turned to Dennis.

"I've just arranged with the lieutenant here to let you off for to-morrow evening," he announced. "Mr. Terhune has planned a little experiment at his rooms and he wants you to be present with the rest."

"I'll be no party to it, sir!" Dennis declared in some alarm. "I'm a fireman, not a dummy for him to try out his scientific stunts on. What's on my mind is my own business and has nothing to do with what happened last night; I'll not have him dragging it out of me with his little recording machines!"

"Don't mind him, sir. He'll come, right enough," McCarty assured the Inspector as they left the firehouse. "He's as wild as the rest of us to get at the truth of the case. Not that I'm wanting to butt in, but it's got me going worse than the Rowntree affair last year."

"Has it?" Inspector Druet darted a keen, sidewise glance at him. "What do you think of it, Mac, anyway?"

"That there's more than one holding out on you, sir," replied McCarty frankly. "Though who it was got in the Jarvis house, nor how the poor creature's body came to be on the operating table in Mr. Norwood's museum instead of the skeleton is more than I can figure out."

"You don't subscribe to Mr. Terhune's theory, then?"

"Well, there's difficulties in the way of it, sir." McCarty remembered his mud-bespattered legs and gave his over-

coat a surreptitious tweak in the back. "You've the glove that Denny found on the ladder?"

"Yes." The Inspector paused abruptly and then added, "It was you who notified Oliver Jarvis over the telephone of his wife's death, wasn't it?"

"It was. That is, I didn't say what had happened. When I got him at his club I just told him Mr. Norwood wanted to see him right away."

"How did he take it?" asked the other, as they halted on the doorstep while McCarty produced his keys. "Was he alarmed?"

"No, but surprised, like, as anybody might have been," the ex-Roundsman threw open the door. "There, sir! First flight up and mind the gas bracket in the wall; I've scraped my own head on it many's the time."

Inspector Druet obeyed instructions and presently they were seated in McCarty's shabby, comfortable front room with an open box of cigars between them and live coals sputtering cheerily in the grate.

"How long had Jarvis been at the house when I got there?" the inspector reverted to his subject once more.

"Only a few minutes, sir. Mr. Norwood himself met him at the door and he said he'd come as quick as a taxi could bring him and asked what was the matter. His voice sounded concerned, like, but not alarmed; not as if he was afraid of some trouble come to himself. Mr. Norwood told him an accident had happened to his wife and then broke down and sent him on into the museum. 'Twas Mr. Terhune told him finally."

"Did it appear to affect him very profoundly?"

"Affect him?" McCarty repeated, regarding the other in puzzled surprise. "You saw him yourself a minute after, sir. He went stark crazy when he looked at her face and turned on Mr. Norwood. We had to pry him loose! He

accused the poor old gentleman of having killed her, but the next minute he came to his senses and apologized, and then he broke down himself and fell on his knees by the table; that was when you came in."

There was an unspoken question in McCarty's attitude as though he could not grasp the significance of the Inspector's trend, but the latter did not leave him for long in doubt.

"Mac," he said, "is Oliver Jarvis one of those whom you think is holding out on me?"

"Mr. Jarvis? No, sir! Wasn't it himself that found the Christmas cake and those letters made of macaroni paste? He could have destroyed them and no one the wiser except Margot, and she would never have breathed a word of them if she hadn't seen it was all up. Instead of hiding or getting rid of them, he's as anxious as anyone to find out the meaning of it all. No, I'd hardly think Mr. Jarvis was keeping anything back."

Inspector Druet smiled, then his face grew thoughtful and almost stern.

"If neither of the two maids admitted to the Jarvis house the person who ransacked the dressing-room he must have got in himself, and he didn't force an entrance, because there are no marks; he let himself in with a key. Who would be likely to have a key to that house?"

McCarty drew a deep breath.

"You don't mean that 'twas Jarvis himself——" he began.

"I know I can trust you, Mac. I don't want this mentioned to anyone until I have completed my investigation along this line. If you remember, when Jarvis described his movements of yesterday, he said that he had an appointment with his attorneys immediately after lunch, and had gone from there to the French consulate, where he was

detained until past seven. As a matter of fact he did not reach his attorney's office until three, left at four-thirty and did not show up at the French consulate until after six. So much for his alibi."

"But why should he——" McCarty floundered helplessly. "There's no sense to it, sir! His own wife——"

"Nevertheless, he makes no attempt to account for that hour and a half." The Inspector shrugged, and then leaned forward. "I'll tell you something else, Mac. You asked me just now about the glove that Riordan found on the ladder outside the museum window. Here it is; and here's the mate to it!"

Before McCarty's amazed eyes he drew from his pocket a pair of oil-stained brown gloves and threw them on the table. Then he added:

"I found the second one this afternoon, among Oliver Jarvis' motoring togs, in his own room!"

CHAPTER X

IN THE DARK

EX-ROUNDSMAN McCARTY had just completed his sartorial equipment the following evening and stepped back to view with immense satisfaction the mirrored effect of a new and—as he fondly believed—conservative necktie, when the entrance bell rasped a raucous summons.

Pressing the button which released the lock downstairs he lost himself again in admiration of the vividly striped knot beneath his chin until a lugubrious shadow darkened the doorway, when he turned to behold Dennis Riordan, also in state attire but with apprehensive gloom riding upon his countenance.

“All ready for the shindy?” McCarty nodded his greeting. “Come in, Denny; don’t be standing there looking like an undertaker’s assistant. ’Tis no wake we’re invited to!”

“I’m far from a well man,” announced the visitor. “I’ve had a kind of a sinking feeling all day and it’s in my bed I should be this minute instead of letting Terhune make a monkey of me!”

“In your bed? In a funk-hole, you mean?” retorted McCarty, severely. “I’m surprised at you, that’s always the first up a ladder with the hose and the last to jump when a wall begins to go, to be scared of Mr. Terhune and his little machines. Of course, if your conscience is not clear——”

He paused expectantly and Dennis rose to the bait.

"'Tis as clear as your own the night, but much good that'll do if his unholy contraptions work crooked. Do you mind the time he all but accused you because in one of the stunts he pulled you got excited and your pulse or something registered a hundred and eighty in the shade? I'm in no condition to have any tricks pulled on me, and although I'm not a religious man and well you know it, Mac, I misdoubt that this is tempting Providence on a Sunday evening."

"After the quiet little games you've sat in of a Sunday, I guess you'll not be getting further odds on your chances in the next world by what you'll be doing to-night," McCarty commented with withering sarcasm, "Come on, now. I want a word with Mr. Terhune before the show starts."

It still lacked twenty minutes of the hour appointed when they reached the apartments of Wade Terhune. A tall, lanky, studious-looking young man admitted them and his pale, nearsighted eyes blinked behind their huge-rimmed glasses as he beheld McCarty.

"How are you, Bassett?" The latter extended his hand cordially. "'Tis like old times to be in on another of Mr. Terhune's scientific try-outs. We're a trifle early, I'm thinking——"

"That's all right, Mr. McCarty," the assistant responded. "Mr. Terhune thought you might come before the rest and he told me to send you right into the consulting-room."

Dragging the reluctant Dennis in his wake, McCarty proceeded down the hall and rapped smartly upon a door at its farther end.

"Come in. Ah, it is you, McCarty!" Terhune glanced up from a coil of silk-covered wire which he was manipulating in the center of the great, bare room. "Good evening, Riordan. Don't mind that! You haven't hurt it."

"That" was a screen which the unfortunate Dennis in his effort to render himself as inconspicuous as possible, had knocked over. Behind it was revealed a long table on which stood a row of glass retorts not unlike huge thermometers. Each contained a thin tube of ruby-colored liquid and the outside glass was spaced off in degrees. A series of separate wires led from the table to the floor and disappeared beneath a rug. Upon the wall above the table a huge square frame jutted out, enclosing what appeared to be a chart of some sort upon which long perpendicular lines had been marked, the spaces between headed with numbers, ranging from one to seven. Separate wires ran from the bottom of the frame to the base of each retort.

With a muttered ejaculation Dennis drew hastily away from the mysterious mechanism he had so unexpectedly exposed and Terhune turned to McCarty with a slight smile.

"You spoke of one of my scientific experiments last year as a 'séance,' my dear McCarty. The test we are going to use to-night will be somewhat like one." He gestured to the circle of chairs which surrounded him. "I have had very little time in which to prepare my apparatus, but I do not expect a conclusive result to-night, just a mere indication to prove that my hypothetical reconstruction of the affair has a basis of fact. I'm sorry that you could not come last night, for I wanted an opportunity to talk over a certain phase of the case with you prior to this experiment, but, after all, I fancy that you and I are not working from different angles in this case."

"I'm not working on it at all, sir; I'm an innocent bystander," McCarty asserted blandly, ignoring Dennis' eye. "Of course, I'm interested in it being as I was on hand, when the body was found, but I've no more idea who murdered the poor lady than a blind man."

"Blind men sometimes know more than we credit them with." Terhune's smile had deepened in significance. "If you could be guilty of intentional ambiguity, my dear McCarty, one would conclude that you had indeed formed an opinion not far removed from my own. But why is our friend Riordan seemingly practicing the goose step?"

Dennis halted in some confusion.

"It's them wires," he explained. "I've no mind, Mr. Terhune, sir, to be electrocuted before my time, and I don't know what I may be stepping on."

His tone was distinctly aggrieved and their host hastened to reassure him.

"The wires are quite harmless. Come over here and I will explain the nature of our little experiment to-night. You see these seven chairs arranged in a circle? When the others come I will ask you all to seat yourselves and take hold of this wire with your right hands on the bulbs. You will then be blindfolded and listen to a brief résumé of the case. That is all that is required of you; just to listen, and not relax your hold upon the bulb. It is quite simple, you see."

"Blindfold?" Dennis betrayed symptoms of renewed apprehension. "Mr. Terhune, if it's all the same to you, I'd just as lief look on. I never was much of a hand at parlor games, and if anything's sprung on me sudden I'm liable to break up the circle."

"Nonsense! You are not under examination, my good fellow, but I want you to take the test along with the rest. Mr. Vivaseur has no connection with the case, either, but he is going to put himself in my hands, in order to witness a practical demonstration of my methods."

"Vivaseur? The young lady's fiancé?" Dennis momentarily forgot his perturbation. "And will she be here, too, sir?"

"No. This is strictly a stag affair. It is a test primarily of mental suggestion and the blindfolding is merely as an aid to concentration."

The door-bell pealed authoritatively and as his host and McCarty turned to greet the arrival of Inspector Druet, Dennis gazed wonderingly about him. The wire, unwound, formed a huge ring in which at a distance of about a yard apart were set seven bulbs covered with a gray, felt-like substance. Dennis pressed one gingerly and it gave beneath his fingers like a half-deflated rubber ball.

Dropping it hastily, he glanced about the room. It was lighted solely by a large center dome in the ceiling, heavy curtains covered the windows and alcove, and the fireplace was bare. On either side of the hearth stood a square cabinet resembling a talking machine, but save for these, the rug, a tall Colonial clock, the seven chairs arranged in a circle and the screen in the corner, the huge room was empty.

His inspection finished, Dennis' hand strayed longingly to the pocket wherein his pipe reposed, but that solace was denied his crawling nerves, and selecting a chair as far removed as possible from the screen and the devilish mechanism it concealed, he seated himself with the air of a martyr, just as the door-bell rang once more.

Calvin Norwood, Oliver Jarvis, Captain Marchal and a large, fair-headed man whom Dennis assumed to be the Englishman, Vivaseur, were ushered in solemnly by Bassett, who closed the door and retired behind the screen, and after subdued greetings, Wade Terhune took the floor.

"As I have just explained to our friends here, this experiment is merely a little test in mental suggestion and I shall be grateful if you will all assist me by concentrating as profoundly as possible upon what you will hear," he began. "I will ask you to sit motionless, and not to make

the slightest sound until the test is completed, but to listen very closely and attentively. } Captain Marchal, will you sit here, please? I remember that at the dinner on Friday night which had so tragic an aftermath I promised to arrange to have you present at the next scientific experiment upon which I might be engaged, but I confess I little imagined under what circumstances I should keep my word."

His tone was sympathetic, with just the right blend of cordiality and courteous deference, yet McCarty glanced sharply at him. The allusion to a blind man returned to his mind and as its significance dawned upon him his eyes sought the face of the secretary. He found it resolutely composed, but haggard and weary with an almost waxen pallor. Unutterable sadness, the numbed reaction of shock and a settled melancholy he read there, but no sign of the disquiet of a secret knowledge as yet unrevealed, at which the criminalist had hinted.

As requested, the young Frenchman had seated himself at Dennis' left and beside him Terhune placed Oliver Jarvis. Then Calvin Norwood, Vivaseur, Inspector Druet and McCarty, the latter at Dennis' right, completed the circle of seven. When they had seated themselves, Terhune, standing well outside the circle, reached over Norwood's shoulder and picked up the wire.

"Mr. Norwood, will you kindly hold this bulb lightly in your right hand, with the fingers closed over the top, the palm encircling it and the thumb underneath? That is it. The bulb, I may add, is perfectly harmless, an ordinary rubber sphere filled to a certain degree with gas and covered with an absorbent substance. Now will each of you please take up the bulb nearest you on the wire and hold it in the same manner, with the right hand only? Remember that under no condition must any of the bulbs be dropped until the test is at an end. I am going to ask

you also to submit to being blindfold to ensure your undistracted concentration."

Bassett produced the folded white cloths and Terhune made the rounds of the circle carefully adjusting each bandage. He started tactfully with Oliver Jarvis, at Captain Marchal's left and finished with Dennis, at his right. The Frenchman divined his action and smiled faintly in acknowledgment.

"I am already blindfold, is it not so?" he remarked quietly, adding something which McCarty failed to hear, for Dennis' muttered declaration intervened:

"Never again unless I'm caught napping and subpœnaed!" he asserted in a sepulchral undertone to his friend. "The wire's across my knees and I can feel it sending a cold thrill to the marrow of me! Mac, if anything should happen, the Firemen's Benevolent Association——"

"Shut up, you loon!" McCarty growled. "Whist, now, and listen. You're worse than a woman!"

Dennis received the scathing rebuke in injured silence and Terhune's quiet, level tones sounded once more from somewhere behind them.

"Try, please, to concentrate, to fix your minds only on what you will hear, and to visualize the scene I am about to describe to you. All ready, Bassett? Lights out!"

Utter blackness succeeded the gray film before McCarty's eyes and in the tense silence which ensured the chair at his left creaked audibly.

"We are now in a room with which you are all familiar." Terhune's voice had sunk to a droning monotone. "It is large with a very high ceiling, a fireplace at the side, and four windows at its farther end, reaching to the floor. Cabinets and glass cases line the walls and above them are shelves containing various bottles and jars, while still higher, against the walls themselves, are hung assortments

of odd weapons, knives, clubs and firearms. In the center of the room is a long table covered with a red and yellow blanket which is stained in dark patches of brown."

As he paused Dennis drew a stertorous breath which ended in a gulp as McCarty's elbow dug viciously into his ribs. The rest sat as though spell-bound.

"It is twilight and the corners of the room are in shadow." The monotonous voice went on. "Dusk is creeping in at the windows and the wind is rising."

Was it the imagination which Terhune had so often accused him of lacking, or did a faint moaning as of wind in the chimney actually come to McCarty's tingling ears?

"The door opens. See! A man enters. His face is in shadow but he paces softly, impatiently up and down. He halts. He is listening, waiting. Now he resumes his pacing. The dusk deepens——"

This time there could be no mistaking his senses, and McCarty felt the hair rise upon his tingling scalp. He had *heard* a key click in a lock, felt a light current of air as a door opened and the sound of footsteps on bare, polished floor came plainly to his ears, halting and then continuing again. Moreover, a faint odor of tobacco assailed his nostrils; tobacco of a peculiar blend which seemed strange and yet vaguely reminiscent.

The little group sat tense and motionless, and in the utter stillness the echo of measured footsteps seemed to beat upon McCarty's brain. That odd, halting, hesitant yet curiously rhythmic triad; where had he heard it before? It ceased as he pondered and the low, steady voice droned on:

"He stops once more and listens. He hears light footsteps on the stairs of the passageway, the rustle of a gown. A woman stands in the door, he advances to her——"

"A-ah!" A harsh, shuddering cry, like that of a tortured animal broke in upon the monotone. It rose from

somewhere within the circle, quivered on the air and died away, but McCarty could not have told from which side it had come. He was straining every sense to grasp the intangible, elusive sensation which had stolen upon him even before that cry had cleaved the air.

Above Terhune's voice there had sounded the patter of light footfalls, the soft, sibilant rustle of silk, and now another odor, pungent and cloyingly sweet, obliterated the tantalizing scent of tobacco. It was a rare and exotic perfume, and as it mounted, heady as new wine to his brain, McCarty seemed to stand once more beside that still form upon the table and again the blind secretary's horror-stricken cry rang in his ears: "The scent of the Rose d'Amour! It is Madame Jarvis!"

"They meet. We cannot hear what they say, for their voices are low, but his tones are impassioned, hers quiet and restrained. See! He is urging, pleading with her; she refuses to listen, refuses to take him seriously, to fall in with his mood——"

A woman's voice, high, and sweet, and clear as a rippling brook echoed in soft laughter through the room and then the words came with startling distinctness:

"Really, I don't know what in the world to say——"

"Her laughter maddens him!" Terhune's voice broke in upon that other eerie once, and his droning note had changed. Into its monotone there crept a breathless quality as of suspense, and it rose in a crescendo of swift, dramatic fervor. "He tries to take her in his arms, but she repulses him, at first gently, then imperiously. He becomes enraged, she defies him! See! He is advancing upon her with menace in every line of his crouched figure! She tries to elude him, to escape, but he seizes her! They struggle, she is fighting for her life!"

He paused abruptly upon the final word, and before

the ringing echo of his voice had died upon the air a succession of other sounds, pregnant with suggestion, took its place.

McCarty could have sworn that close beside him in the darkness two bodies were locked in a death-struggle. He heard the man's stertorous, grunting breath, the woman's sobbing gasps, the scraping shuffle of feet upon the floor, a muttered oath, a smothered cry and the sharp sibilant sound of tearing silk. Then a shriek rang out hideous in its import, rising in an agony of mortal fear and dying in a horrible choking gurgle which ebbed into silence.

McCarty had forgotten his immediate surroundings, forgotten that tense circle of which he formed a part; he was back in Norwood's museum in the very presence of wanton crime and death and the voice of Terhune, monotonously level and unemotional once more, failed to break the illusion.

"The woman's body is huddled motionless upon the floor by the table now and the man is standing over her. He realizes what he has done, his passion is dead within him and he is scheming to gain time before the inevitable discovery of his deed; time in which to divert suspicion from himself. His clenched hand falls upon the table and as he feels the woolly texture of the blanket, and the hard bony structure beneath an inspiration comes to him. He jerks the blanket from the table, seizes the skeleton and carrying it to the fireplace thrusts it up the chimney."

As he spoke the sound of footsteps came again, a harsh rattle as of dry and brittle bones, and the soft rustle of silk once more. Then a dozen hasty steps, a metallic click and the creak of a casement, accompanied by a sudden blast of chill air.

"He has lifted the woman's body to the table and covered it with the blanket. Now he has gone to the end of the

room and opened one of the windows. But see! A long strand of black hair is wound about the button on his coatsleeve; it catches on a broken sliver of wood on the window frame as he leans out and clings there as he closes the window without fastening it and turns——”

The footsteps with their curiously hurried yet hesitating gait passed so close that McCarty felt that he could have reached out and touched the man, but a strange numbness held him in leash.

With straining ears he followed the subdued, diminishing tread until it died away and in another moment a dull, grating thud ensued.

“The man has descended to the yard, raised the ladder and placed it against the window ledge. Now he re-enters the house, mounts the stairs, closes the museum door and departs. Do you hear him? He is walking down the hall toward the front of the house. His footsteps die away in the distance; he has gone! But here in this room that motionless figure lies beneath the blanket while the shadows creep nearer and nearer, the gloom deepens and night comes.”

“Evelyn!” A deep-throated cry, hoarse with anguish, pulsed upon the air and ceased in a moaning gasp as Terhune called out in brisk, normal tones:

“Lights, Bassett! Gentlemen, the experiment is over!”

CHAPTER XI

THE WRITING ON THE WALL

FOR a full minute McCarty blinked dazedly in the sudden glare of light. His thoughts in their abrupt transition from the realm of mental suggestion to manifest reality failed at first to co-ordinate and he sat as one emerging from a trance.

Then gradually he became aware of moving figures and subdued voices about him. Wade Terhune was standing over Oliver Jarvis holding a glass to his client's lips while Norwood hovered solicitously about, visibly shaken by the ordeal through which he had passed but in obvious indignation.

"Sorry to have knocked you out like this, Mr. Jarvis." Terhune's smooth tones rose above the general stir. "I tried to prepare you——"

"It was brutal!" Norwood interrupted. "If this is your science, Mr. Terhune, this wretched clap-trap to reconstruct a scene of horror, as false as it was cheaply melodramatic, and force a bereaved man to undergo such wholly unnecessary torture, the old third-degree methods of the police are infinitely preferable! Try to put the whole abominable thing from your mind, Oliver! We know that what we have listened to here to-night is sheer rot; Evelyn was killed in her own apartments, poor child, and all this elaborate farce cannot twist the facts to prove a baseless theory!"

Jarvis shook his head and rose, steadying himself with a hand on the older man's arm.

"No, Uncle Cal. I have the utmost confidence in Mr. Terhune and he must pursue the investigation in his own way. I knew in advance what was going to take place to-night and I gave him permission to use that phonographic record of Evelyn's voice. I thought I had steeled myself to endure the sound of it, but I must have overestimated my strength and the realism of the whole thing swept me off my feet. Do you think, Mr. Terhune, that your test has been productive of the result you anticipated?"

"I cannot tell until I have examined the records," Terhune responded, unruffled by Norwood's tirade. "I will confer with you early in the morning, before the funeral. You must try to rest to-night and steady your nerves, for the utmost we may already have accomplished can at best be only circumstantial and the most difficult task still lies before us."

A new voice at McCarty's right caught his attention and he turned to find the Englishman, Vivaseur, in animated conversation with Inspector Druet.

"By Jove, it was immense!" His face was flushed and his gray eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "No wonder this chap is celebrated at home as well as in the States for his amazing work! The crime was a hideous affair, of course, and I'm cut up about it on Miss Norwood's account and all that, but as I didn't know the lady I could approach this thing from a more impersonal, analytical point of view than the others. The illusion was perfect! I don't mind telling you, Inspector, that it quite gripped me. Gad, what an actor the fellow would have made!"

"Mr. Terhune's methods are unique and he has obtained some creditable results from them," Inspector Druet responded somewhat dryly. "We don't always agree with him in theory, but he has given the department some valuable pointers in more than one case."

Vivaseur stared, then laughed.

"Quite so. I'd forgotten that Mr. Terhune was a free lance. Naturally your methods differ. It's been ripping, though, to be in one of his tests; haven't the least idea what he was getting at, but I wouldn't have missed it for worlds!"

Terhune had left his client and McCarty's eyes followed him as he started toward the screen when Captain Marchal suddenly barred his way.

"May I be permitted to congratulate you, Monsieur?" His tone was quiet, with no suspicion of a sneer, and yet there was a quality almost of challenge in it which brought the other up standing. "As a grim little playlet of the Grand Guignol, produced in darkness, it would have been admirable; as an exposition of the case upon which you have bent your distinguished efforts it is of a surprisingly novel point of view. Mes compliments!"

"I am glad you were interested, Captain!" Terhune smiled steadily. "To make use of your comparison, the drama is not yet finished; it still lacks a climax, but that will come."

"When it does, let us hope that it will not prove an anticlimax," Marchal shrugged slightly. "Is it that we are no longer required here, Monsieur? We may depart?"

"Yes. The experiment is finished."

Captain Marchal's heels clicked with military precision as he bowed and turned to Calvin Norwood while Terhune advanced toward the screen. McCarty rose to follow when a voice close at his side made him pause.

"Please let go of the bulb, Mr. Riordan," Bassett was urging patiently. "It is all over. Mr. Terhune has finished with the experiment and I want to take up the apparatus now. Mr. Riordan!"

But Dennis was oblivious. He sat rigid, with his eyes

squeezed tightly shut and an expression on his face of one who had been set apart from the things of this world. One hand gripped the arm of his chair and the other clung tenaciously to the rubber sphere on the wire.

"Denny, for the love of God, come out of it!" McCarty shook him vigorously. "Is it hypnotized you are? Open your eyes, you big chump, and leave go of the bulb!"

"Eh?" Dennis drew a deep breath and relaxed limply, blinking with the air of a suddenly awakened somnambulist. "Did he get away? Where's the corpse?"

"Laid out these two days and well you know it, if you'll get your wits about you!" retorted McCarty, jerking the bulb from his friend's grasp. "A fine exhibition you're making of yourself!"

"But I heard it, the murder and all!" Dennis affirmed in an awestruck whisper. "Mac, where the devil was I? What's come to me!"

"You've been listening to Mr. Terhune's little spiel, with phonographic accompaniments and a little cologne and cigarette smoke thrown in for good measure," responded the other. "'Twas all a trick, man, but it got me, too, for a minute. We'd better be getting on our now; the rest are all leaving."

Terhune, emerging from behind the screen, caught the reluctant note in his former colleague's tones and came forward.

"Wouldn't you and Riordan like to wait and learn the result of the experiment? Bassett and I are going to check up the records now and we will find out if our man has betrayed himself."

"Thanks, sir, we'd like nothing better than to stay for the finish." McCarty accepted promptly before Dennis could speak. "'Twas a remarkable stunt you pulled off the night, Mr. Terhune. If it's not asking too much,

would you tell us later how you worked some of it? The fight, and all?"

"Go and see for yourselves while I get rid of these people." Terhune waved toward the alcove. "The properties are all there, behind the curtains, and I'll explain their use to you later."

"Come on!" McCarty seized Dennis' arm and pulled him to his feet as their host turned to his departing guests.

Reluctantly Dennis permitted himself to be led to the alcove, but when the curtains parted he recoiled.

"There's another of them!" he gasped. "Let me get out of this! What with spooks and murders I've been through plenty this night to turn me gray, and if I'd known that thing was here the saints themselves could not have got a blindfold on me!"

He pointed with a trembling finger at a skeleton which lolled lackadaisically in a chair grinning up at him, but McCarty dragged him past, and over to a table against the farther wall.

"Do you see this cigarette end and the ashes in the tray? That's where the smell of tobacco came from. And look!" He picked up a tiny crystal atomizer and pressed the bulb gently, releasing a fine spray of perfume. "That's the scent Mrs. Jarvis herself used, God rest her soul! Don't you remember it? It was clinging to her yet when we found the body."

Dennis sniffed experimentally.

"One perfumery smell is like another to me except the stuff the barber douses me with when I'm not looking," he remarked conservatively. "What's the bolt of silk for, and that sand-paper paddle?"

"To make the sound like the rustling of her dress and *the tearing of it in the struggle,*" hazarded McCarty. "I

don't know, though, about the opening of the window, nor the ladder——”

“I used this heavy bookcase door to simulate the opening of the casement.” Terhune's voice sounded from just behind them. “This board scraped along the mantel shelf produced the effect of the ladder grating against the window ledge. It is quite simple, you see.”

“But the skeleton, sir?” Dennis ventured.

“I borrowed that from an artist friend of mine, to get the real sound of rattling bones, at the moment when I described the substitution of the body for the skeleton,” explained Terhune. “Bassett imitated the footsteps; he is light on his feet and I rehearsed him carefully this afternoon.”

“And the struggle, sir? I could have sworn I heard a man grunting and muttering and breathing hard, and a woman's voice raised in that fierce, choking cry at the end,” McCarty declared.

“You did. It was a talking machine record made especially for me yesterday by two professionals at the studio of the company from which I purchased my machines in here.” He led the way back into the consulting-room and motioned toward the cabinets on each side of the hearth. “The first woman's voice that you heard—the little laugh, and the sentence: ‘Really, I don't know what to say’—was the living voice of Mrs. Jarvis.”

Dennis crossed himself surreptitiously and even McCarty started in awed astonishment.

“You mean, sir, it was a record she talked into herself?” he asked.

“Yes. I learned from Miss Joan Norwood that one evening a few months ago she and her uncle, Oliver Jarvis, his wife, and several of their friends amused themselves by talking into a reproducing phonograph. She had pre-

served the records and I persuaded her to lend me the disk upon which Mrs. Jarvis' voice was recorded. The opening sentence of her speech was all I could use, but it was startlingly apropos."

"It was all of that, sir," Dennis averred solemnly. "'Twas like black magic, the whole of it! But for what did we hold on to them little rubber balls strung on the wire?"

"I'll demonstrate that to you now. Ready, Bassett?"

"Yes, sir."

The assistant, followed by Inspector Druet, appeared from behind the screen.

"First of all, you must know that I timed my theoretical reconstruction of the murder scene very carefully." The criminalist began. "You perhaps did not observe that a double set of wires extended from the ring upon which the bulbs were strung. One set ran under the rug to the screen and the other led to the clock. It is a physiological fact that nervousness superinduced by fear or a kindred emotion betrays itself by dryness of the mouth, stricture of the throat, irregular action of the heart and moisture and contraction of the hands. It is to the latter that I have confined myself exclusively during this test. Of course, the result cannot be infallibly accurate, for allowances must be made for the physical condition of each individual which only a physician could diagnose, but we will obtain at least a significant indication in each case."

He walked over to the tall, Colonial clock which stood against the wall and opened the narrow doors of its base. The interior was brightly illuminated by electric lights in seven long slender tubes of varicolored glass set against the sides and back. A series of slender-pointed steel indicators, like the hands of a clock, reached from each tube to a dial beside it on which numbers from one to twenty were arranged in a circle.

"You will observe that the glass tubes are tinted the seven chromatic colors of the prism, with violet as the base, graduating through the different hues to red at the top, and the extent of the illumination varies in each tube," Terhune continued. "The bulbs which each of you held in your right hand were covered with a highly absorbent composition and these tubes register the degree of moisture exuding from your palms at given intervals. The actual test was arranged to take just twenty minutes to complete, from half-past eight to ten minutes before nine, and I had rehearsed it, timing each sentence and pause for the suggested action until I knew to the minute when each phase of the scene I reconstructed was reached. The indicators reaching out from the side of each tube to the dial beside it records the exact moment when the degree of exuded moisture, superinduced by mental suggestion, increased.

"For instance, take bulb number one, which was that held by my client, Mr. Jarvis. He is naturally in a feverish, weakened condition and super-sensitive to suggestion. The degree of moisture in the palm of his hand increased steadily through the violet, indigo and blue stages to the fourth—the green—where it remained until the tenth minute of the test; the minute when the voice of his dead wife sounded from the talking machine. Then the record leaped two degrees, through yellow to orange, and there remained. At no time did it reach the maximum—or red—degree at the top of the tube.

"Number two—Mr. Calvin Norwood—shows but a normal degree of moisture until the third quarter of the test, the struggle, when it increased slowly two degrees, but became no more intense. Number three—Why, this is indeed curious!" He pointed to the third tube, which was illuminated to the very top. "The moisture excretions

here are abnormally profuse from the start and quickly reached the maximum, but since the increase was steady and not in spurts it indicates general nervousness rather than the effect of emotional reaction. Bassett, who held the third bulb?"

"Mr. Vivaseur, sir."

"Ah, I thought so." A gratified smile touched Terhune's thin lips. "From his appearance I should have believed him to be in better physical condition than this indicates, but his interest in the test was so keen that he betrayed it from the start, despite his phlegmatic exterior. Number four—that was yours, Inspector—remained absolutely normal throughout, and McCarty—number five—only registered one degree above normal. Our friend Riordan, here, is evidently in better shape physically than Mr. Vivaseur, but his record only falls one degree short of the Englishman's. Your hand perspired with abnormal profusion from the start, Riordan."

"And why wouldn't it, sir? I'm reeking from every pore of me." Dennis announced with dignity. "'Tis a cold-blooded fish that could sit quiet and blindfold in a room where there's murder being done, and not sweat like a glass of—of ice-water on a hot day!"

He glanced witheringly at McCarty, but the latter was watching Terhune.

The latter with furrowed brow was examining the last tube and when he spoke his usually level tones were charged with suppressed excitement.

/"The man who held the seventh bulb was normal at the start, but almost immediately his record jumped two degrees. That was even before I described the arrival of the woman. Then it shot up three degrees—to the yellow space—until the tenth minute of the test, when the voice came from the talking machine. From that moment on

it gradually subsided to normal!" He paused and added slowly: "I confess I had not foreseen this. Captain Marchal must either have assumed quick control of himself or——"

"Marchal?" The Inspector laughed shortly. "Oh, he's out of it, Mr. Terhune! Your reconstruction of the murder must have been all Greek to him."

Terhune shrugged.

"Let us see what the other record reveals." He suggested, leading the way to the screen. "These glass retorts register the contraction of the fingers on the bulb and the degree and period of pressure which are in turn recorded numerically upon the chart."

The spaces between the perpendicular lines on the large framed chart upon the wall were covered now with irregular rows of figures illuminated from behind and the thin thread of ruby-colored liquid in each retort had risen to varying heights.

"I will not go into a maze of technical detail now as to the process by which the pressure upon the bulbs is transmitted and registered. It is too complicated and if you are unfamiliar with the pulsometer invented by Professor Wekerle of Buda Pesth, and in use by the criminal investigators throughout the continent to record the pulse beats of suspects under examination, an explanation would be well-nigh unintelligible to you," Terhune vouchsafed. "I will merely read you the result recorded here.

"Mr. Jarvis held the bulb lightly at first, but his hand contracted convulsively at the suggested entrance of his wife and again at the sound of her voice. During the struggle he gripped the bulb tenaciously, but from the moment of the final death-cry his hand became limp. That is perfectly natural and quite as I anticipated. Mr. Norwood's fingers worked nervously about the bulb, alternately

energizing and relaxing until the struggle, when he, too, squeezed the bulb in a sustained pressure, which gradually diminished.

—“Number three—Ah! as I expected! Despite Mr. Vivaseur’s profuse exudations, denoting his absorbed interest, he held the bulb lightly, as I had instructed, without the slightest tremor or contraction until the end. However, you, Inspector, were not as unimpressed as you would have us believe!” He turned with a smile of triumph to the official. “The voice, the struggle, the death-cry and even the sixteenth minute of the test, when the suggestion was conveyed of the strand of hair being caught on the window casing, each made you start and tighten your grip upon the bulb!”

“Possibly.” The Inspector admitted dryly. “Apart from its theoretical value the little scene you staged for us was realistic enough to make one forget momentarily that it was a mere ingenious illusion.”

“And you, McCarty!” Terhune pointed to the fifth record upon the wall. “You, at least, comprehend the motive underlying my experiment, I see. When the cigarette was lighted——”

“Yes, sir,” McCarty interrupted quietly. “I thought I recognized the kind of a sweetish smell of that brand and the gait of those steps coming and going reminded me, too, of some I’d heard just lately. I knew then who you had picked out as the murderer and ’tis small wonder if I squeezed that bulb like a sponge!”

“You registered surprise at the voice on the machine, and sustained excitement during the struggle.” Terhune pursued. “After that, however, you relaxed your hold upon the bulb. The end of the test did not impress you as the first had done. Still stubborn, eh, McCarty? Still

unwilling to accept any fact based on other than most obvious evidence?"

"Well, Mr. Terhune, I don't know, of course, what there is back of all this," McCarty responded cautiously. "You see, I'm not on the case, sir, and I've no way of learning how you doped it out."

"I don't see anything particularly significant in all this," Inspector Druet remarked with a touch of impatience. "What is the answer, Mr. Terhune?"

"We are coming to that," Terhune replied. "The sixth record is fairly obvious. From the beginning of the test to its completion the bulb was compressed in a grip which never relaxed an iota."

"That was Denny," observed McCarty. "He'd be holding on to it now only we pried him loose!"

"The seventh and last record, however, gives us something vastly different." Terhune's tones had quickened. "Evidently our friend Captain Marchal also recognized the odor of that particular brand of cigarette, for instinctively his fingers tightened about the bulb. The pressure increased at the suggested entrance of the woman and held until the talking-machine record was turned on. Then it relaxed utterly and after that there were several quick, hard pressures; not nervous or spasmodic but more as though he clenched his hand in anger. The choking death-cry, the incident of the strand of hair catching on the window casing, the placing of the ladder against the ledge and the final retreating footsteps each caused him to grip the bulb tightly in quite unconscious muscular contraction, but the pressure reached its highest degree when I spoke of that strand of hair. Gentlemen, I told you before this little experiment was attempted that I expected nothing conclusive from it, but merely an indication as to whether

my theory was tenable or not. | I think we have here all the confirmation necessary to warrant a request which I am about to make. I have indisputable evidence that Captain Marchal was madly in love with Mrs. Jarvis. I propose to prove to you that she was totally unaware of this unfortunate attachment, having taken merely a kindly, pitying interest in the young, blind officer which he had mistaken for a reciprocal infatuation; that he became desperate as the time approached for her departure for France; that on some pretext he lured her to the museum when he knew their interview would be undisturbed and there declared his passion. When she repulsed him and he realized the hopelessness of his suit he killed her. Until such time as I am able to produce proof of this, Inspector, may I ask that you place Captain Marchal under strict surveillance?"

"Every occupant of both houses has been shadowed from the hour the crime was discovered," Inspector Druet responded. "At this stage of the investigation I am not prepared to refute your theory, Mr. Terhune, but ingenious as your reconstruction of the murder was, I am afraid you will find that it won't work. For one thing, there's that little matter of blackmail which doesn't fit in with your theory. Captain Marchal only came to this country three months ago——"

Terhune smiled in infinite superiority.

"My dear Inspector, Captain Marchal had nothing whatever to do with that. It is a coincidence, of course, but Mrs. Jarvis' death was in no way connected with it. Whatever her secret, the blackmailer would not have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. You will remember that in those fantastic communications composed of macaroni paste she was never threatened with death, but only with exposure; it was to the blackmailer's obvious interest to keep her alive and he is probably highly chagrined at the

tragic turn of affairs. It is unfortunate that we seem to be invariably working at cross purposes, but as in the past I think you will find my theory to be the true solution of the affair. Scientific testimony is incontrovertible and in spite of his self-control the man has laid bare his innermost thoughts to us here in these records.

“He recognized the odor of his particular brand of cigarettes—a brand practically unknown in this country—and knew that his secret had been discovered. He betrayed his emotions in the ensuing scene but with the sound of his victim’s voice on the machine he pulled himself together and realizing the vital need of caution in this test which he now saw was directed solely at him, he deliberately relaxed. However, he could not help that instinctive clenching of his hand at the points which told most against him. There cannot be the slightest doubt, of it, Inspector. Captain Marchal is the murderer of Mrs. Jarvis.”

CHAPTER XII

"BACK FROM THE DEAD"

"I'VE had enough and to spare of the workings of science!" Dennis announced as he and his companion trudged homeward through the crisp night air. "It's small use the Inspector has for it either, if you believe in signs."

"Well, the Inspector has one theory of the case and Terhune has another, and I have mine," McCarty responded noncommittally. "No two of them are alike and all of them may be away off the truth, but the Inspector is right in one thing, to my way of thinking; even if the murder was not a direct outcome of the blackmailing the two are connected, and I'd not be surprised if the same hand that pasted those macaroni letters tightened the scarf about the poor woman's throat. Terhune figured it out as I did that she came to the Norwood house and to the museum of her own free will, but right there our ideas of what actually happened don't tally, in spite of the fact that I don't know what she went there for, if 'twas not to see Captain Marchal."

"And what is the Inspector's notion?" asked Dennis. "Who does he think did the murder?"

McCarty shook his head.

"If he suspects anyone in particular, 'tis not the Frenchman," he replied evasively. "'Twas just to talk the case over with me in a general way that he came to the engine house for me yesterday."

"And what about your trip to the movies last night?"

Dennis demanded in swift after-thought. “I’ve not seen hide nor hair of you all day. Did that Etta come across with any dope?”

“Not yet, but, Denny, ’twas a real hunch I had! She knows something, all right, but she’s too scared to breathe it. She’s the gabby kind, and a murder like that happening in the family she worked for would, in the ordinary course of things, give her a topic to talk about to the end of her days; she would be so full of it now that you’d not be able to get a word in edgeways about anything else, if she took you for a friend and had nothing to hide. As it was, she was ready enough with her conversation on any other subject, but every time I went back to the murder she shut up like a clam. I don’t want to be rushing her too much and get her suspicious, but I’m going to keep on the job till I find out what’s on her mind.”

“Look out you don’t let yourself in for breach of promise while you’re doing it,” Dennis cautioned forebodingly. “To my mind, there’s only one way that either the Inspector or Mr. Terhune will make headway and that’s by finding out what it was Mrs. Jarvis was being blackmailed for and who sent her the cake and those crazy letters.”

“There’s that,” McCarty conceded. “But ’twould be a long step toward the truth if we knew why she went to the Norwood house at all, that afternoon.”

The ex-Roundsman had invested the inheritance from his uncle in an installment-plan colony known as Homevale and thither business called him the next morning. His pride and satisfaction at becoming a landed proprietor had long since been dampened by the insatiable demands of his tenants and as he boarded the train for his estate he was in a mood of dull resentment against his deceased relative. Had it not been for the money he would still be on the force; a captain by now, perhaps, or high in

the detective bureau. He might have had an official hand in the Jarvis case, instead of being as now, a mere looker-on; tantalized by its possibilities, engrossed in the problem and yet destined to stand aside.

His negotiations with the luckless householder who had summoned him were brief and of an all but violent nature, and he returned fuming to his apartments. There, thrust under the door, he found a torn and not over-clean scrap of paper which swiftly altered his mood.

"Mr. McCarty please call at once on Mr. Norwood. Most important. Billings."

For a moment he stared at the roughly penciled message, glanced at the telephone, hesitated, then clapped on his hat and made for the street once more.

He found Calvin Norwood pacing the floor of his drawingroom with wrathful indignation in every line of his small, immaculate figure.

"Well, McCarty, this is a pretty state of things!" he exclaimed as they shook hands. "I sent for you because you seem to be the only one concerned with this mysterious affair who has an open mind and a grain of common sense left. The police have ridiculed me and derided my efforts to assist them in the past, but now they have surpassed even their former record of stupidity and insolence! Do you know that I am actually under surveillance? I, and every member of my household, even to my niece and her fiancé? It is monstrous, insufferable!"

"Is that so, sir?" McCarty observed innocently. "I'd not be concerned about it, Mr. Norwood. The department follows a regular routine in every case and it's no sign that you're under suspicion of the murder; it's just because the body was found here in your home. Belike they'll shadow everyone connected with Mrs. Jarvis till we've found out who killed her."

“But it is a direct imputation of suspicion!” the little elderly man fumed. “Evelyn Jarvis was like a daughter to me, my niece loved her as a sister, and as to Mr. Vivaseur, he never even laid eyes on her! He is generous enough to appear merely amused at the espionage to which he has been subjected in entering and leaving this house, but it is a hideously embarrassing position for both my niece and myself. He is a member of one of the oldest noble houses in England; in fact, there are only three lives between him and a dukedom, and although I am not a snob, I was delighted that my little girl and the inheritance which will be hers are to be allied to such a distinguished family. It is infamous that in addition to her grief for her friend she should be subjected to such indignity; it is enough that the very threshold of her romance should be clouded by tragedy! And now, to add to my general distress of mind, Victor is down!”

“Down?” McCarty repeated.

“He is desperately ill; some sort of fever, I think. I was afraid of it from the first, I thought that the shock of the murder would be too much for him in his weakened condition. It is a great pity, for he was rallying so bravely from the horrors he has been through and the crushing blow of his own affliction.” Norwood glanced nervously about him and then bent forward confidentially. “When we returned last night from Mr. Terhune’s ghastly experiment I saw that it had affected him, but good heavens! we were all wrought up about it. It was the most harrowing exhibition of chicanery imaginable! However, I was so concerned about Oliver that I gave little thought to Victor and he retired to his room almost at once.

“This morning when he did not appear at breakfast, I sent up to inquire about him and Billings reported that he paid no attention to the knock upon his door, but seemed

to be talking to someone in the room with him. I went up immediately myself and found the poor lad tossing upon his bed, muttering deliriously and in a high fever. I gave him an opiate to quiet him and he is sleeping now, but I do not know what his condition will be when he wakes."

"You didn't send for a doctor, sir?"

Norwood hesitated.

"No," he replied at length. "It will be necessary, of course, if he grows worse, but I think I can bring him around all right. A doctor would insist upon installing a nurse at once, and just now I want no intruders in the house. Besides, in his delirium, poor Victor's mind is naturally dwelling on the crime and he utters rambling sentences which might sound strange to an outsider's ears; I should not care to have even the servants hear him, for they are an excitable, hysterical lot. That is really why I sent for you, McCarty. We are all due at the funeral this afternoon, of course, and I thought that perhaps you wouldn't mind sitting with him until I can return and relieve you."

McCarty's pulse gave a sudden leap, but he responded quietly:

"I'll be glad to, sir. I'm sorry for the poor young man."

"And you'll keep whatever you may hear to yourself?"

Norwood continued in nervous haste. "He seems to be living over again in his feverish brain that hideous farce we were forced to listen to last night, and Inspector Druet or Mr. Terhune in their frantic endeavors to fasten the crime on the first unfortunate person to give them a shadow of an excuse would seize upon his senseless, incoherent words as evidence upon which to base an odious suspicion. You know as well as I do, McCarty, that the boy is utterly innocent, but after last night's travesty of an experiment and my discovery that the Inspector has deemed it necessary

to place us all under surveillance I would believe them capable of anything!"

"They'll get nothing from me," McCarty promised. "You know, sir, I've no connection with the investigation, but I'm mighty interested in the case, all the same. What do you think about it yourself, Mr. Norwood?"

"I don't know. I scarcely dare to let my mind dwell on it." He passed a shaking hand across his eyes. "When I remember Evelyn as we have always known her; tender, sweet, gentle, open-hearted and open-minded as a child, and then remember those sinister letters and that anonymous Christmas gift—that cake which she preserved so carefully and so secretly—I shrink from facing the possibilities of the truth. How little we know, after all, of the innermost depths of those about us! Understand, McCarty, I am not taking it for granted that her secret was necessarily of a heinous or disgraceful sort, but the very fact that she did not take her husband into her confidence when the first threatening letter reached her, that she submitted tamely to the blackmail imposed upon her, is evidence enough that a secret existed which she was compelled to guard at all costs. A week ago I would have scorned such a suggestion; even now I cannot realize it, I cannot reconcile it with my conception of the girl's character. It's like a nightmare!"

"It is certain, then, that Mrs. Jarvis did pay the money demanded from her?" asked McCarty. "Have they found out yet how much was gotten out of her?"

"No, but the letters speak for themselves. The tone of the last one shows that she must have communicated with the blackmailer in some way, protesting against the sum required and stating her inability to comply; she probably put a note to that effect with whatever money she placed under the rose bush on that night last May.

Do you remember how that last letter in macaroni paste was worded?"

"I have a copy of all three of them here," McCarty produced his wallet. "The last one begins: 'Lady can and will. 1000 under bush 26 each month small price safety.' The one before that, the second one, asks: 'Does lady forget date of next Saturday night?' That must have meant the twenty-sixth of the month. It must have been on that date years gone that whatever it was happened about which Mrs. Jarvis had to pay for silence."

Norwood shuddered.

"Poor child! Why did she not let the truth be known and brave the consequences? I am as sure as I am of my own Joan that Evelyn had been guilty of nothing her husband could not fully and freely have forgiven. She must have gone through untold suffering and suspense last year! I wonder that I did not notice the change in her which her maid described, but I was engrossed in my own affairs. It was just before my departure for France."

"Was it a criminal case that took you over, sir?"

"The greatest in history." Norwood smiled slightly. "I went to inspect the devastation in certain areas in France for a relief committee of which I am a director. I sailed in June and returned in August, bringing Victor with me to act as my secretary. He is the last of a very old family, aristocratic but impoverished, and I became greatly interested in him."

"It was in September that Mrs. Jarvis first began talking of going to France, wasn't it?" asked McCarty.

"Yes. Oliver is barred from active service because of a concussion of the brain which he suffered in a football game at the university some years ago, but I think my description of what I had seen in France influenced them both in their decision to take up reconstruction work there. Poor Evelyn

was so happy in anticipation of it, so filled with plans—” he broke off and added after a pause: “That was why she took so deep and sympathetic an interest in Victor and it is only natural that her terrible death should have been such a shock to him. Last night’s ghastly business was the final straw laid upon his overwrought nerves.”

“I’ll go up to him now, Mr. Norwood; shall I?” suggested McCarty. “He might wake up and need something or start raving again.”

“It would be best, perhaps, if you don’t mind,” Norwood assented with obvious relief. “Your lunch will be brought up to you on a tray and I’ll show you what medicine to give him if the delirium continues; that is all that can be done for him, to try to keep him absolutely quiet until the fever has run its course. I’m afraid it will be a long vigil for you, McCarty, but I’m grateful to you for undertaking it.”

He led the way up one flight of stairs to a small but cheerful room on the second floor.

“I put Victor in here, next to my own dressing-room because it is nearest the head of the stairs,” he explained. “I wanted to save him as much groping about as possible. Come in. See, he is still asleep.”

In the semi-gloom of the drawn curtains the figure on the bed lay motionless save for the spasmodic rise and fall of the coverlet across his breast. As McCarty bent over him a broken sigh fluttered from the parted lips and they twitched but no words came.

Norwood whispered instructions about the medicine and withdrew and the volunteer nurse settled down to his vigil.

The face of the unconscious man, relaxed and shorn of the mask of stern repression and control which it habitually wore, was haggard and tragic in its revelation of suffering. All the agony, mental and physical, of his affliction and the inferno through which he had passed was written there, and

for the first time McCarty realized the weight of the burden which the proud, self-contained young man had borne in mute resignation, and must continue to bear while he lived. He felt a sense of shame as though he were intruding upon a privacy that was almost sacred, but even as he averted his eyes the sick man stirred upon his pillow and a hoarse mutter issued from his lips.

"That voice! If I could be sure! But no, it is impossible——"

He lapsed into a rapid staccato murmur of French unintelligible to McCarty, but the latter had heard enough to turn his thoughts into a new channel.

The "voice" must mean, of course, the phonographic record made by the woman now dead but what doubt was it that thrust its way uppermost in Marchal's mind, even in the throes of his delirium? What question was it that haunted him?

The murmuring gradually died away and for a space there was silence save for the irregular breathing of the sick man. Then one of the thin hands clenched and fell across his breast as though he would have struck himself a blow but that his strength failed.

"If I had waited! Dieu, if only I had waited one little minute longer! But how could I know?" His tones had risen in a sort of wail and then as swiftly changed.

"The dead!" It was a mere toneless whisper. "Back from the dead!"

McCarty's superstitious mind recoiled, but the whisper ceased and the steadying, rhythmic breath told that the sufferer had sunk once more into profound slumber. Had he been living over again the horror of the previous night's experiment, or had his disordered brain conjured up a vision of the woman whom in life his sightless eyes had never beheld?

The speculations of the watcher were interrupted by a low knock upon the door.

“H’Ive put your lunch h’on a table in Mr. Norwood’s dressing-room, sir,” Billings announced. “Ow is the Captain, h’if I may arsk?”

“He’s coming along all right, Billings.” McCarty tip-toed ponderously from the room and closed the door behind him. “Rest is all he needs now, and plenty of it.”

“He was right bad this morning, sir. Gave me a turn, it did and no mistake, to ’ear ’im talking to ’imself when h’I came to call ’im. H’I would ’ave taken my h’oath there was two of them in ’ere, sir!”

The butler’s manner was full of portentous gravity, and McCarty drew him into the dressing-room.

“What was he saying?” he demanded.

“Well, sir, h’T’ve said nothing to Mr. Norwood, but the poor young gentleman was ravin’ first in that foreign lingo and then in h’English and he kept sayin’ h’over and h’over: ‘Blind! Who would believe? I cannot speak!’ And then, sir, ’e cried h’out in quite a terrible voice that turned my blood cold in my veins: ‘It is you who killed her!’ ’Ow I got downstairs, sir, is more than I know for my legs give under me——”

“Is that all?” McCarty turned to the table with affected indifference. “He didn’t know what he was saying, of course. That’s only the murder on his mind, like it is on all of us. He’s got a touch of fever, and dreaming all kinds of things about it, but he’ll wake up himself again and none the worse.”

McCarty ate a hasty luncheon and returned to the sick-room with the butler’s words ringing in his ears. Was the accusation which had issued from the lips of the unconscious man mere idle raving, or had he indeed some secret

knowledge of the crime which he dared not divulge for lack of proof?

Victor Marchal still lay as he had left him, but after an interval his sleep became troubled once more. Strange visions peopled his wandering mind, past horrors returned and for a nerve-racking hour McCarty listened with bated breath while the other, now in English and now in French, made graphic by his tone and expression, led his men once more into the battle which had cost him his sight and lived again the hours of his Gethsemane in No Man's Land.

Then the cause of his delirium changed. A softer expression stole over his worn features, a faint smile of ineffable pathos hovered about his lips and he murmured so softly that the words were scarcely audible:

"Mais je t'aime! It cannot harm thee for thou wilt never know. In thy divine pity and kindness thou art as blind as I to the worship in my heart which I may not speak! Only to myself may I whisper thy dear name. Evelyn! Evelyn!"

McCarty stiffened in his chair. Terhune had been right! There was no mistaking the note of hopeless love in those faint tremulous tones, but the words themselves belied the criminalist's theory. Here was no eager, jealous, destroying passion, but a humble adoration. Abashed, the watcher drew back as again the feeling of honest shame possessed him for the part which he was playing and in that moment the smile faded from Victor Marchal's lips and a spasm of grief contorted his face.

"Dead! But I shall not speak! That one service I may render, that the secret shall never be known. Only when I am sure of that other, then it shall be between us!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLACK WALLET

WHEN Calvin Norwood returned he found McCarty still seated by the bed and Victor Marchal sleeping deeply.

"The fever is broken, I think, sir. His forehead is cool and damp," announced McCarty in a cautious whisper. "I managed to get a dose of that medicine down him about an hour ago like you told me, and he's been lying there like a child ever since."

"Good! He will rest quietly now for an hour or two at least." Norwood turned again to the door. "Come downstairs and we can talk."

With a relieved glance at the unconscious man, McCarty followed his host from the room and down to the library. That silent hour which had ensued since the astounding revelations had reached his ears had brought a swift inspiration and a plan which he meant to put into immediate execution. He was no diplomatist, however, and while he cast about in his mind for a way to broach his subject, Norwood interrupted his train of thought.

"How was he, McCarty, before you gave him the medicine? Pretty bad, eh?" He spoke perfunctorily, but his eyes gleamed with unconcealed anxiety behind their huge-rimmed glasses.

"Yes, sir. He wandered some, like anybody does in a fever," McCarty admitted. "He wasn't what you'd call violent, though. I've seen them when they'd want to throw themselves out of bed entirely."

"Did he talk much? What did he say?" His eagerness betrayed itself now in his tone and McCarty responded with deliberation.

"Well, the half of it was French, Mr. Norwood, and that let me out. For the rest, one minute, he'd be thinking he was back fighting in the war again, and the next he'd be puzzling his poor sick brains about the murder, but 'twas all in a jumble, like, and you could hardly make head or tail of it. Do you think he'll be all right now the fever's broke?"

"Unless he's in for a complete nervous breakdown." Norwood moved somewhat impatiently in his chair. "But tell me what he said about the murder. Did he allude to last night?"

"Not in so many words. I don't remember rightly just what he said, sir, it was all so mixed up, but he seemed to be wondering who could have done the murder and once he said something about how kind she'd been to him, mentioning no names," McCarty lied blandly. "I'm thinking the war is on his mind as much as the murder, if you ask me."

"Hah!" Norwood emitted a snort of evident satisfaction and relief. "I'm glad the poor fellow has turned the corner, anyway. Now, if Mr. Terhune and Inspector Druet will leave him alone and not excite him with their fool tests and questions, he may pull himself together in a few days. I appreciate your remaining with him to-day, McCarty. I knew you were too sensible to take any stock in the ravings of a sick man, but I wouldn't say as much for those who are conducting the case. We were shadowed even at the funeral and I don't mind telling you that I'm getting confoundedly tired of it!"

"So it's all over, sir; the funeral?" McCarty asked. "How is Mr. Jarvis taking it?"

"He bore up splendidly, considering the frightful strain

✓ he is under. The crowd was terrific; there was a mob of morbid sight-seers extending for a solid block or more, and the police had difficulty in forcing a way through for the funeral cortège. Poor Evelyn; poor child! Well, it is over and now we must bend all our energies to finding the wretch who brought this terrible thing upon us. I've dabbled in crime mysteries for years, as you know, but somehow I cannot take hold of this, I cannot grasp it. The blow struck home too closely for me to get the right perspective on it, if you know what I mean. Joan says it is a judgment upon us—having poor Evelyn's body found here—for maintaining that collection of crime relics. She always hated it and could never be induced to enter the museum."

"It's a wonderful collection you've made, though, Mr. Norwood." McCarty seized artfully upon his opportunity. "There's none other like it in the country, and you're the envy of the whole department."

Norwood's slight dapper figure straightened and he stroked his pointed beard complacently.

"It contains a bit of evidence of almost every known form of crime," he remarked. "I started it many years ago, with a small bottle of poison tablets which, labeled 'saccharin,' had lain upon a certain lady's boudoir table in full view for days while the authorities searched far and wide for her rival's murderer. I have added other relics to it as time went on and opportunity offered until I flatter myself that it is a fairly complete collection."

"It is that!" McCarty agreed heartily. "But you've not found much to add to it lately, sir, have you?"

"Indeed, yes. It has been greatly augmented within the last year or so," replied the other. "The rope with which old Ogilvy was hung by his own valet, who afterward cut him down and gave the alarm of suicide; the germs of typhoid

by means of which the notorious Doctor Venner disposed of his invalid wife's rich relations, the furrier's knife which figured in the Rankin case, and many more came to me through various channels. When we were so tragically interrupted the other evening I was on the point of showing them to you."

"Couldn't you——" McCarty hesitated. "Would you feel like showing a few of them to me now, sir, and telling me their history? I suppose after what's happened you'll want to fight shy of the museum for a while, but I've a tremendous interest in it. Many's the time in days gone that I heard of your collection but never did I think I'd see it with my own two eyes."

"I promised Joan that the museum would be kept locked until her marriage next month." Norwood hesitated. "She vowed that unless I gave her my word she would not remain under my roof; she feels a nervous horror of the whole thing, you see. However, she won't be home for an hour or so yet—I persuaded her to allow Vivaseur to take her for a short run out into the country in his car after the funeral for she has been cooped up for days, crying her eyes out and I don't want her ill on my hands, too. I'll be glad to show you a thing or two which will interest you, McCarty, and I assure you that in spite of what has occurred I feel no qualms about entering the museum where the result of my life work is stored. Come along."

As they passed down the hall McCarty asked suddenly:

"Did you come across that missing finger-print photograph yet, sir; the one of Mrs. Jarvis' impressions?"

"No. It slipped my mind completely and I forgot to ask Victor about it," his host admitted. "However, as I told you, it can only be mislaid."

He produced his key and opened the door and together they stepped into the room. The pale wintry rays of the

westering sun slanted obliquely in at the tall windows, gleaming mistily on the glass tops of the cases already veiled with a film of dust and a stale, musty odor prevailed, as of an apartment long untenanted.

"Phew! The room was aired thoroughly on Saturday, but it is stuffy in here already," Norwood advanced and opened one of the windows wide, then turned and took from its hook upon the wall a length of knotted rope. "This is the Ogilvy noose. The valet had cleverly fabricated a lot of circumstantial evidence to convey verisimilitude to the suicide theory, but he made one fatal error; the peculiar formation of the knot proved conclusively that the aged millionaire could not have adjusted it himself. Moreover it has a certain odd twist, as you can see, which was found to be the species of knot used in staking down balloons prior to an ascension, and investigation disclosed the fact that early in life the valet had been an exhibitor at county fairs; a parachute jumper. A nice bit of detail, wasn't it?"

"It was that!" McCarty examined the rope with an air of absorbed professional interest and handed it back. "How long have you had it here, sir?"

"Since the conclusion of the trial, eighteen months ago," Norwood responded. "Here are some of Doctor Venner's typhoid germs which were found secreted in his bathroom after the fourth mysteriously coincidental death from that disease in his household in as many months. He had placed the germs in the water cooler and his insistence upon having that article installed directed the first suspicion against him. A friend in the District Attorney's office who knows of my hobby procured the specimen for me last summer. This is the furrier's knife of which I told you. I do not believe that an implement with a keener blade than than this exists. It was sewn into the ermine collar of an

evening coat designed for Mrs. Judson Grey in such a manner that the point would penetrate the fur and pierce the neck near the jugular vein when the garment was fastened. A sudden death in the family sent Mrs. Grey into mourning, however, and she gave the coat, unworn, to her niece. The unfortunate girl died in a taxi on her way to the theatre, as you may remember, and the ensuing investigation placed the blame on the establishment which had made the coat, but it is very generally surmised who the real culprit is."

"It's a wicked-looking knife, and no mistake," commented McCarty. "Did you add it to your collection lately, Mr. Norwood?"

"About two months ago. This five-dollar gold piece is one of those made by the Delmore counterfeiting gang. It came into my possession purely by chance."

"When was this, sir?"

"In October." Norwood looked his surprise at the persistency of the question. "Why are you so interested in the dates, McCarty?"

"Because I know you've no time to be showing me all your collection now, Mr. Norwood, and the relics you've got just lately are what I'd rather know about than those of cases long past and gone. There was one thing you mentioned last Friday night whilst we were all having dinner with you." McCarty paused and then added: "You were going to show it to us, you said, sir, but instead we came on the murder. I don't recall what it was exactly but 'twas something you told us held the only clue to a mystery that had set New York by the ears a good while ago. You'd only got it within a few days——"

"Of course! The Hoyos wallet!" Norwood's face lighted eagerly and he turned to a tall cabinet against the side wall between the fireplace and the corner where stood the case of *finger-prints*. "It has not entered my mind since the dis-

covery of poor Evelyn's body. You remember the affair, don't you? It was a nine days' wonder a decade ago. Hoyos was a foreigner of somewhat obscure antecedents but supposed wealth who was breaking into society of a sort by means of Wall Street. There were rumors of wild parties on his yacht and one night he disappeared from on board; weeks later his body was found in the river, fearfully mutilated, and the case was never cleared up. But where can the wallet be? I was sure that I put it here."

While he talked Norwood's slim, nervous fingers had been running over the assortment of documents and note books with which the narrow shelves were filled and now he stood back gazing in perplexity about him.

"Perhaps Captain Marchal has moved it?" suggested McCarty.

"No. He didn't know where I had placed it and he never touches this cabinet, for its contents are of no use to him in cataloguing the collection. He cannot see to read the notes and other papers, you know, and these blank books are filled with my own private memoranda of the different cases in which I have specialized. No one ever touches them but myself. I cannot understand it!"

"Maybe you put it somewhere else yourself, sir, by mistake." McCarty had approached and stood looking over the other's shoulder. "What did the wallet look like?"

"It was the usual-sized bill folder, of very fine grained black seal worn brown at the edges, and contained two letters——" Norwood broke off. "What can have happened to it? I know I did not touch it after I put it away here last Tuesday afternoon; I never mislay anything and I had no occasion to open this cabinet again until Friday, just before I went to Professor Parlowe's. Then I came to get out some data on a recent poisoning case that I wanted

to discuss with him, and the wallet was here. I distinctly remember seeing it, for an idea came to me to take it along and show it to the Professor; I decided not to do so, because he is only interested in poisoning cases—he is an eminent toxicologist, you know—and when he is engrossed in an experiment he resents bitterly the introduction of any other topic. I closed the door of the cabinet but did not lock it; in fact the key is still here in the lock as you can see for yourself, McCarty. Someone must have taken it out during the excitement following the discovery of the murder! But who would have any interest in it? The case has been shelved and forgotten, even by the authorities.”

“If you are sure it has been taken, sir, whoever did it must have known where to look,” observed McCarty. “Did you show the wallet to anyone after you got it or tell them where you had put it?”

“No, but anyone familiar with the museum and my method of arranging its contents knows that I keep all documents and papers here.” Norwood ran his fingers through his hair. “But what am I saying? What possible object could anyone I know have in taking it? Of course, it being a wallet, someone who had access here may have thought that it contained money and may have appropriated it. It could have been seen through the glass door and the key was there in the lock.”

“Who could have got in here?” McCarty asked. His eyes had narrowed swiftly and there was a note of suppressed eagerness in his tone which the other was too engrossed in his fresh problem to be cognizant of. “Didn’t you say Captain Marchal was with you in here that afternoon just before you left to call on your friend the professor? Didn’t Captain Marchal come back after you’d gone to put away some notes he’d been copying?”

“Not copying. Victor cannot see to read notes, you

must remember," Norwood replied testily. "I said he had transcribed them. } During the last month, while he was familiarizing himself with the use of the typewriter I went ahead with my own preparation of a monograph on the various objects in my collection and talked my subject-matter into a dictagraph for Victor to transcribe in his leisure moments. The dictagraph is in the library beside his typewriter and the cylindrical records for it are kept in the drawer of that cabinet over there. He took a record or two to work on while I was away that afternoon and the papers he put back were those upon which he had typed what the machine had dictated to him. When I spoke of anyone who might have access here I was thinking of strangers; those detectives from Headquarters or the Homicide Bureau or the men who came with the Chief Medical Examiner to take the body away."

"You'll not be finding any of them monkeying with petty larceny!" remonstrated McCarty loyally. "Who knew that you had the wallet, anyway, Mr. Norwood? Who did you tell?"

"No one. That is, only a few of my most intimate circle," the other amended. "I wasn't sure of obtaining it until it was actually in my hands. The woman had been dickering with me for her price, but I was afraid until the last moment that she would back out of her bargain."

"What woman?"

"The one in whose possession the wallet had been all these years; a former stewardess, I believe, on Hoyos' yacht."

"And you got the wallet from her last Tuesday?" A swift memory of what the butler had told him darted across McCarty's mind. "Did she bring it to you late in the afternoon? Was it her you were talking to in the parlor and could not be disturbed when Mrs. Jarvis called to tell

you about the experiment the professor was going to make on Friday?"

• "Yes. How did you know?" Norwood paused and then added impatiently: "That has nothing to do with the disappearance of the wallet, however. I shall make a thorough search for it to-morrow, and question Victor as soon as he recovers, but I am convinced that it has been taken!"

"You said that you told a few people about it, sir? Who were they?" McCarty persisted, his breath quickening a trifle in spite of his effort to appear calmly indifferent. "Did you write to anybody about it?"

"Only my niece, Joan, and that was a week before the wallet actually came into my possession; when the woman first approached me with her offer to sell it, in fact. Victor knew about it, of course, and Billings may have heard us discussing it at the table. But this is absurd! He has a superstitious horror of the museum and couldn't be induced to come in here on a wager. Besides, the wallet and its contents would be of no use to him." Norwood hesitated. "I cannot think——"

"Did you speak of the wallet to the Jarvises?" McCarty interrupted suddenly.

"I may have done so. Yes, I believe that I did." Norwood's tone was constrained.

• "Before the woman brought it to you or after, sir?"

"Afterwards. That is, I—I think it was. I cannot remember exactly." There was a furtive reluctance in his reply which did not escape McCarty's ear, and he asked quickly:

"Wasn't it at that dinner party you told them of it? The dinner they gave in their own home on Wednesday evening?"

"It may have been. Yes, I am under the impression that

it was." Norwood's perturbation was manifest and he added nervously. "However, that is beside the point. You are probably right, McCarty. A thing like that doesn't disappear by itself and no one would have the slightest reason for removing it. I must have mislaid it in the excitement following the murder——"

"Mr. Norwood." McCarty faced him and gazed steadily into his shifting eyes. "When you told the Jarvises about getting this wallet and the letters or whatever was in it did the rest of the people who were there at the dinner hear it too?"

"Naturally, since I told of it at the table," Norwood responded in unguarded haste. "Nobody was particularly interested, however, beyond mere idle curiosity about an old, forgotten case. I don't remember discussing it with anyone else, and if I did it doesn't matter, McCarty. Now that I think it over I can see that I must have mislaid it myself. I will doubtless find it to-morrow."

He closed the cabinet door and turned with an air of finality as if to lead the way from the museum, but McCarty lingered.

"What was in those letters, sir, that were in the wallet? You said yourself that they were the only real clue to the mystery of how the man came to his death. Who wrote them?"

"I don't know!" Norwood wheeled about irascibly. "The woman who sold them to me claimed that they were written by someone who had good reason to want Hoyos out of the way, but naturally she would not disclose their contents until I had paid for them. I was obliged to take them blindly at her valuation and trust to luck that I had not been swindled."

"But you read them after, sir!" McCarty exclaimed. "You must know what was in them! You couldn't have

put them away with never a look after being so anxious to get them and paying out good money——”

“I was called away,” Norwood demurred hurriedly. “I—I did glance over them the next day, but the ink had faded and the writing was almost illegible. It would have been necessary to study them under a magnifying glass, and I hadn’t time then. That was Wednesday, you see, and on the following day something or other occurred which put them out of my mind. I did not think of them again until the wallet caught my eye when I went to get the memorandum to take with me to Professor Parlowe’s. For all I know they may have been a mere fraud and the woman an impostor. People know my weakness and have tried to swindle me before this. I—I haven’t the least idea what the letters contained or who is supposed to have written them.”

He raised his eyes defiantly to meet McCarty’s steady gaze and read there the futility of his attempt at evasion. He had lied and the other knew it. A dull, mottled red crept into his cheeks, but with a shrug he turned once more and led the way to the door and this time McCarty followed in silence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TWENTY-SIXTH OF MAY

INSPECTOR Druet was seated at his desk at Headquarters, scowling over a voluminous sheaf of reports when ex-Roundsman McCarty put in an appearance at the close of the day. To an observant eye, the latter's extreme affability of manner would have savored of blandishment, but the official was too engrossed in his own perplexities to heed.

"I thought I'd just drop around and see how things were coming," McCarty announced, appropriating a chair by the desk and producing two opulently banded cigars from his pocket. "Try one of these, sir. You'll not find it bad."

"Since when are you smoking perfectos, Mac?" inquired the Inspector with a shrewd smile at his former subordinate.

"Since I've been hobnobbing with society." McCarty regarded the glowing tip of his own cigar somewhat dubiously. "They've a cool, sweet pull to them but they've not the body that I'm used to. However, I've no doubt Mr. Norwood's a judge and if Billings can educate himself up to them, I can."

"Norwood!" the Inspector snorted. "His meddling is one of the worst nuisances we have got to contend with in this case! Has he been regaling you with one of his pet theories?"

"No, sir, though you'd hardly blame a man that's had the body of one of his best friends dumped down on his doorstep, as you might say, for wanting to take a hand in

finding out who's responsible for it," McCarty paused and added slyly: "especially if he and his relations are being trailed whenever they poke their noses out of doors."

"We've drawn a blank there so far, I'll admit." Inspector Druet thrust the sheaf of reports which he had been fingering into a pigeonhole. } "Not that I expect to learn anything incriminating from that quarter, but I'm taking no chances on overlooking a possible clue. Jarvis is the man I'm after, Mac; I have no direct evidence as yet, but I am having his record looked up and to-day I requested from him a detailed accounting of his wife's estate. If I'm not mistaken, he won't find that an easy thing to produce."

"You mean that he's taken her money?" McCarty asked.

"I can't call it that, since she gave him power of attorney; turned the whole thing over to him, in fact, although last spring she did get about twenty thousand back on the plea of war charities, he says. But I have discovered that during the past two years he had lost heavily in stocks; been on the wrong side of the market almost continually and his broker's books show that he has made desperate efforts to recoup lately. This proposed trip to France was in my estimation only a stall to keep his wife in ignorance of the true state of their finances as long as possible. He didn't dare refuse to turn over the twenty thousand to her, of course, for fear of arousing her suspicions, but that money which she has been paying out to blackmailers, comparatively small as the amount was, considering her original fortune, might have been a life-saver for him."

"And what do you think of the blackmail part of the business?"

"One of the boys started for New Orleans on Saturday night, and I have two female operatives working now among Mrs. Jarvis' friends and associates," the Inspector

responded significantly. "Whatever the affair was which she went to such lengths to keep under cover, I am satisfied that it had nothing to do with the murder. I'm with our friend Terhune there, but the rest of his theory is all rubbish. I mean to have a talk to-morrow with Miss Norwood; she may know something as she was the dead woman's closest friend."

"She's got money, hasn't she?" asked McCarty irrelevantly. "The old man—her uncle—said something to-day about her inheritance."

"Yes. We got a line on both families. Calvin Norwood's brother married the daughter of old Wexley, the steel rail magnate, and Miss Norwood is quite an heiress. But what took you there to-day, Mac?" Inspector Druet bent a quizzical eye upon his visitor. "Have you got anything up your sleeve? I knew you couldn't keep out of the case if your life depended on it! You wouldn't bother with Norwood, though, if you didn't think there was some clue to be found in that house which we had overlooked."

McCarty smiled broadly.

"Not in this case, sir, but in some that are long past," he replied with a show of candor. "You know it was to show us through his museum that Mr. Norwood got Mr. Terhune to bring Denny and me there to dinner the other night and almost the first thing we came on was that body under the blanket and it was all off. I wanted to see what he has in his collection, though, and hear the story of it and this afternoon I got him to give me what you might call a private view. Some of the stuff he's got there is mighty interesting; I'd like to get the dope on one or two of those old cases, even if they are dead ones. That Hoyos matter, for instance. I don't suppose, now, you could let me have a peep at the records? It's ten years past, and well I know you've enough and to spare on your hands with this

murder and all but I was on the force then, you mind, sir, and it kind of brings it all back to me."

The Inspector's gaze narrowed in suspicion, but McCarty met it with an air of such childlike wistfulness that he laughed good-naturedly and pressed a button in his desk.

"Sure you can see them; I'll have Yost look up the files. You are not fooling me for a minute, though, Mac! It isn't the Hoyos case, or any other old crime which Norwood may have docketed in his museum that is interesting you. I've had both of those households watched, you know, and I got a report on where Etta Barney, the Jarvis' housemaid, spent Saturday evening. I had an idea myself that she might have known who broke into Mrs. Jarvis' dressing-room, but I couldn't make her come across. Did you manage to wheedle anything from her?"

"No, sir," responded McCarty frankly. "If she did hear a noise and suspect who it was she would hardly be telling me when she knew I was in with you. Is Margot still sticking to her story that the dressing-room was all in order at eight o'clock that night?"

The entrance of Yost in response to Inspector Druet's summons prevented an immediate reply from the latter, but after his instructions were given and the door had closed he swung about in his chair.

"I can't make that girl out. There is every indication to make me believe she is on the level and yet the facts as we know them show that her statement must be a lie. Mrs. Jarvis was murdered before six o'clock and her body spirited across to the other house; that is the plain truth of the matter, in spite of Terhune's elaborate theory. Margot could have only one reason for trying to fix the time when the dressing-room was ransacked at a later hour, and that is loyalty to the husband of the dead woman. If she knew or suspected that it was he who returned to the house dur-

ing her absence upon her errand and guessed what took place then she may be trying to make us believe that the dressing-room had not been entered until evening because she knew that her employer's alibi after eight o'clock that night could not be assailed. I don't know whether self-interest or a desire to shield the memory of the woman who had been good to her prompted that loyalty, but she can't be shaken in her story at this stage of the game. I tell you, Mac, we've the hardest proposition ahead of us that the department has ever tackled, but if I can once get the goods on Oliver Jarvis I can force him to come through."

"McCarty shook his head. •

"In spite of that glove, and the fact that he can't or won't account for the time between his visit to his lawyer and to the consulate, sir, I can't see your case against him," he remarked. "What if he did lose his wife's money? If she cared for him she'd stick just the same, and anyway, he'd have no need to go to the length of killing her when she found it out. Why should he have sneaked into his wife's dressing-room in the afternoon like that? He could have gone in any time at night while she was asleep and none the wiser, if there was anything there he wanted. How did she come to be dressed as the body was when we found it, if the maid had left her in a wrapper and slippers?"

"Oh, I know the difficulties I'm up against, but I'm going to prove my case, for all that!" the Inspector retorted. "Of course, I'll have to wait until I get a full, detailed report on their joint finances, but I have a suspicion that Jarvis has gone through more money than his speculations on the stock market will explain and although I haven't found out where it went yet, there could be more than one reason why it would be vital to his happiness that his wife should not discover the use to which it had been put."

"He was in love with her," observed McCarty. "I'd

bet anything I had on that. There was no other woman in the case and that's the only thing the wife would perhaps have not forgiven, sir."

"As a wife, but there are other kinds of disgrace, that she might have repudiated him for." The Inspector paused. "I won't go into that until I have something definite to work on, but Jarvis' mother was a von Rohne, of the family of Berlin bankers, and if you take a look at some of the records of the Department of Justice, Mac, you'll find that the German taint in the blood of more than one supposedly solid American family is working for treason. Understand, I have no proof, but if it develops that Jarvis was actually giving financial aid here to some underground work of his mother's people, he might well be afraid of his wife's knowledge. Remember, he was unaware of any secret in her own life; he thought her above reproach in every way and knew her to be intensely patriotic. That is only one supposition of mine, but other motives would cover that point.

"As to his going to his wife's dressing-room at that hour instead of at night, it may be possible that he could not wait. He may not have placed her jewels in the safe-deposit vault a few days earlier as he claimed, but have taken them then to realize money on, and she came upon him in the act. He may have had desperate need of that money before night. I know this sounds as if I were trying to build up the wildest sort of evidence to support my theory, but every slight clue in our possession points to him and we cannot afford to overlook any possibility."

McCarty's manner showed that he was still unconvinced.

"Why did she get up and put on that plain, dark dress and how did the blue silk veil or scarf or whatever it was happen to be so handy to strangle her with?" he asked. "If you ask me, sir, it looks suspicious; her giving the

servants the afternoon off and getting her own maid out of the way on an errand and making that excuse about the headache and all."

The Inspector nodded.

"I think you are right there, Mac," he agreed. "If it was her husband she found ransacking her dressing-room, the surprise must have been mutual. You remember Margot's story of her mistress' sudden collapse on Wednesday night after her dinner guests had gone? I think that in some way we haven't discovered yet imperative word reached her from the blackmailers, hinting at some drastic steps to be taken before she sailed for France and perhaps making an appointment for Friday afternoon which she did not dare to ignore. She arranged that no one should know of her errand and was preparing for it when the interruption came."

"And what's your own idea, sir, as to how the murderer got her body to the museum and why he went to all that trouble for nothing?" McCarty demanded bluntly. "Wouldn't he know that when the state of the dressing-room was seen 'twould be supposed the murder was committed there? If 'twas Mr. Jarvis himself, what did he take his old automobile gloves along with him for, much less drape one over the ladder to advertise the fact that he'd been there?"

"Well, this is what happened, as I figure it out now." The Inspector relighted his cigar and settled forward in his chair. "When he had killed her, his first thought was naturally to save himself and divert suspicion from the actual scene of the crime. It isn't easy to hide a human body, but he thought of old Norwood's museum, which sometimes wasn't entered for days at a time. It was too dark for anyone in the rear of the adjoining and opposite houses to see the outlines of a person passing through

the yards and he chanced it. He carried the body to the Norwood yard, hid it under a bush, entered the museum by means of the ladder, opened the door and coming down the stairs and out through the passageway, carried the body back up that way to the museum. That glove is a nice bit of detail, but I think I know the answer to it. Jarvis knew what a shark Norwood is on fingerprint evidence and he took the gloves along to prevent leaving any traces when he forced the catch of the window. Something—perhaps hearing the blind secretary moving about—must have frightened him away before he could remove the ladder and retrieve the glove which he'd dropped."

McCarty brought his hand down on the arm of his chair with a resounding thwack.

"You've hit it, sir!" he exclaimed. "It's been in my mind from the first that the one who climbed the ladder to the museum brought the glove to keep from leaving finger marks behind, but in their hurry I thought they only snatched up one glove instead of the pair, and then got excited and dropped it. If 'twas Jarvis, as you say, why did he take a chance on Mr. Norwood, perhaps, coming in and catching him in the museum with the body?"

"He probably knew that Norwood had gone to Professor Parlowe's, just as he might have learned from his wife during lunch that all their own servants would be out for the afternoon." The Inspector's mollified tone betrayed his gratification at McCarty's belated approval. "I don't think, however, that he knew of Norwood's little dinner party that night or that he meant to exhibit his museum to two such celebrated sleuths as you and Terhune, to say nothing of Riordan; I think Jarvis banked on the hope that the body would not be discovered until the following day, and that after he had established an alibi against possible future questioning he could get home and

put that dressing-room in order before Margot or any of the other servants entered it. That would leave him with a clear slate. I don't deny that he is in very apparent grief now, but remorse would account for it, whether he was in love with his wife or not. He killed her all right, Mac; there's no doubt in my mind as to that."

"Here is the old Hoyos report, sir." Yost appeared in the doorway. "I brought the minutes of the inquest, too, and a copy of the statements made by the crew on the yacht."

"Give them to Mac," the Inspector laughed. "Everything is so tame now, that he has to go back ten years in the history of the department to dig up a little excitement. The cases we've got on hand are too trifling for his consideration since he's become a man of means and his own boss!"

Yost grinned and McCarty chuckled in perfect good nature at the thrust.

"I'm a has-been," he announced. "And like the most of them I'm harking back to the days of my usefulness. Not that I was in on the Hoyos case, but I'd like to know more about it than I remember."

"What kind of a souvenir of the affair has old Norwood got hold of?" the Inspector asked. "If it was of any importance he should have turned it in at the inquest. We never took him seriously, but he may put something over on us some day, for all that."

"He has nothing, sir," McCarty responded, truthfully enough. "He was just talking about it and got me curious to read up the details."

"Well, stay here and amuse yourself with it as long as you like." The Inspector rose. "I've got to get up to the District Attorney's office. I wish you would hang around old Norwood all you can, and if you get any real dope on the Jarvis case let me know."

McCarty promised and as the Inspector departed, settled himself to a perusal of the closely typed sheets which Yost had placed upon the desk before him.

The first which came to his hand was a personal description of the dead yachtsman.

“Leonidas Hoyos, aged approximately thirty, nationality unknown but believed to be of Greek-Hungarian extraction,” he read: “Medium height, smooth shaven, black hair, fair complexion, gray eyes, full red lips, straight nose, rounded, slightly receding chin. Flashy clothes, expensive jewelry. No scars or other identifying marks.”

There was at first glance nothing to arrest his attention in that, yet McCarty read it carefully several times over before laying it aside. The next document was a report of the official investigation into Hoyos' antecedents. Nothing could be learned of him prior to the summer of 1906 when he had presented himself at a prominent brokerage house in Wall Street as a prospective client, with credentials and letters from equally noted concerns on the Bourse and London Exchange. He maintained luxurious bachelor apartments on Madison Avenue, kept two cars and a retinue of servants and during the following winter succeeded in gaining admittance to membership in one or two of the clubs noted more for their sporting tendencies than their exclusiveness. He plunged heavily in Wall Street, netted huge profits and early in the spring of 1907 purchased from the Carmichael estate a steam yacht which he rechristened *The 'Mulette.'*

Then followed records, attested to by the captain, stewards, stewardess and members of the crew of several coastwise trips in which men about town and women known to the festive bright-light district had figured conspicuously and champagne and gambling for high stakes had been the order of the day. In May *The Mulette* had anchored in

the Hudson a few miles north of the city and its owner had given only occasional dinner parties on board.

The report ended abruptly with a list of Hoyos' financial holdings; stocks, bonds, securities and deposits in various banks. McCarty glanced over them casually, noted the total and then took up the minutes of the Coroner's inquest. It was a voluminous record and he turned first to the verdict; accidental death. That, he remembered, had ended the case officially as far as the public was concerned, but he had not forgotten the storm it aroused in the press, nor rumors in the department that the investigation was not to be immediately shelved.

He skipped the verbatim testimony of the witnesses and had settled back in his chair to read the final summary when the opening sentence made him start forward in astonishment with round eyes and quickened breath.

On the twenty-sixth of the month, in the late afternoon, Hoyos had come aboard, ordered dinner for two and sent the dingy back to the wharf to meet his guest. At eight o'clock a woman arrived, heavily veiled, and was ushered to the saloon where Hoyos awaited her. The steward withdrew and no one witnessed their meeting nor could anyone subsequently furnish a description of the woman, for Hoyos took extraordinary precautions against having her seen from the moment of her arrival. He countermanded the order for an elaborate dinner which he had given, directed that a single course with several bottles of champagne be placed in the dining-saloon, and then dismissed the stewards for the night.

Sounds were heard later of a bitter quarrel, with the woman weeping and Hoyos fairly shouting in rage. The noises ceased, however, and quiet ensued until close on to midnight when two pistol shots were heard, followed by two heavy splashes in the water.

Investigation showed that the saloon was empty, the man and woman had both disappeared and an open window with blood upon the sill and Hoyos' own pistol lying on the floor nearby were the only indications of what had occurred. The authorities were notified and an investigation was instituted but there was no trace of either Hoyos or the woman until about three weeks later, on the fourteenth of June when a police boat patrolling the lower bay picked up a man's body which was identified by means of the clothing and initialed jewelry as that of Leonidas Hoyos. The body itself was greatly mutilated, presumably by contact with passing river craft, and an autopsy was unable to determine the presence of a bullet wound but the conditions of the lungs did not indicate death by drowning. The woman's body was not recovered.

For long after he had finished, McCarty sat staring at the papers clutched in his hand, while two sentences formed of macaroni paste letters danced before his mental vision. "Does lady forget date of next Saturday night?" and "1000 under bush 26 each month small price safety."

The twenty-sixth of each month! And it was on the twenty-sixth of May, ten years before, that the mysterious tragedy of *The 'Mulette'* had occurred. The wife of Oliver Jarvis had been a mere child then, in far away New Orleans. What connection had there been between her and the unhappy woman who had been Hoyos' guest, or Hoyos himself? Was it only a strange and unlooked-for coincidence, or had he indeed stumbled upon a real clue? Was he alone upon the right path which should lead through the maze of evasions and contradictions to the truth?

CHAPTER XV

A LONE HAND

“**T**HERE’S little any man can tell about a woman whether he’s married to her or not,” observed Dennis sententiously. “’Tis well for us, Mac, that we’ve always steered clear of them. Look at Mrs. Jarvis, now, with all her good works and the sweet ways of her that everyone who knew her talks about; who’d think she could have been mixed up with the murder of a dirty roystering Dago ten years gone? For she was mixed up in it, I’d bet the half of my insurance policy that you’ve struck it! No matter if she was only a girl then and never North in her life, ’twas to keep that business on the yacht secret, no less, that she was paying out hush money.”

It was Tuesday morning and by special condescension on the part of the Lieutenant, McCarty and Dennis were seated in his private office at the engine house where the ex-Roundsman had been regaling his friend with a résumé of the previous day’s discoveries.

Dennis’ enthusiastic acceptance of McCarty’s theory brought an expansive glow to the latter’s heart, but he merely nodded in affirmation.

“It fits in with what little evidence we have, leaving out the ransacking of the dressing-room,” he responded. “You mind the sudden collapse that came to her on Wednesday night after her dinner party, and Mr. Norwood’s remark that she’d been gay at first and then kind of quiet for a while? ’Twas no message from the blackmailers that

reached her, Denny, but Mr. Norwood's own words, when he told her of the Hoyos wallet and the letters that were in it, that struck her all of a heap in the midst of her pleasant little party, and she was quiet because she was thinking, and thinking hard. She made up her mind then to get that wallet, and 'twas that she was after when she went to her death in the Norwood museum!"

"By the powers! Then 'twas not to meet anybody at all——"

"No. The meeting was an accident, like, to both of them, whoever the other party was."

"A mortal accident to her, poor thing." Dennis hesitated. "If 'twas not the blind young secretary who met her and killed her—and what you heard him say yesterday in his sickness goes to show that he didn't do it—who was it? What was the other one doing in the museum and how did he get in?"

"You're not asking much, are you?" McCarty demanded witheringly. "I've the answer to your last question, though it slipped my mind to tell you before. On Saturday morning before I experimented with the ladder, I gave a look to the lock on the museum door. There were some little fine scratches around the keyhole; I'd seen the like when I was on the force in more than one housebreaking case and I was on in a minute. There's only one thing that makes scratches like that, and only one thing in a burglar's kit of tools that'll open a Yale lock; a 'spider.' Whoever it was got into the museum, broke in, in spite of Marchal there in the library, and he knew just how to go about it. I think from Marchal's ravings that he heard something of what went on, and why he didn't butt in and stop the murder is a mystery to me, but there's more than that to be cleared up."

"There is that!" Dennis agreed. "Why would any-

body break into that museum? There's nothing there that anybody but a nut like Mr. Norwood would want for a keepsake! And why didn't he just beat it when Mrs. Jarvis found him there, instead of killing her?"

"You'll remember there was something there that Mrs. Jarvis wanted bad enough to break in for," McCarty reminded him. "It may have been for the same thing that the man came."

"The wallet!" Dennis wriggled to the edge of his chair. "Mac, maybe it was for the letters that was in it she was being blackmailed! The woman that sold them to Mr. Norwood may have double-crossed the blackmailer and he went to get them back and fought Mrs. Jarvis for them——"

"Hold on, Denny! He wouldn't have killed her," McCarty interrupted. "Terhune was right on that. You mind he said the fellow wouldn't kill the goose that laid the golden eggs? If we could find out what was in those letters, we'd be a long way toward learning the truth. Mr. Norwood knows, all right, but he'll not say another word; when he saw the way my questions were leading, he got a suspicion of the truth for himself and shut up like a clam. Whatever old scandal there is connected with the death of his friend's wife, he'll not be the one to give it away."

"Then how will you find out?" asked Dennis. "You've gone further than Terhune and the Inspector put together but you're a good ways yet from clapping your hands on the murderer. Now if you could get that Frenchman to explain what he overheard——"

"Not a chance. He was in love with her, and from his last remarks before I gave him the medicine, he's out for a private revenge. I've got to begin at the other end and locate the woman who sold Mr. Norwood the letters. Before he suspected anything, he told me she claimed to have been a stewardess on the Hoyos yacht at the time of the

murder ten years ago. The records of the Coroner's inquest make mention of only one woman employed on board, a stewardess named Kate Stricker, and if it's the same I've a good personal description of her from Billings, who let her in when she brought the letters to the Norwood house last Tuesday afternoon."

"But what good'll that do you?" Dennis objected. "'Tis a week ago to-day, and she's probably beat it somewhere with the money Mr. Norwood paid her."

"I'm going to try it, anyway." McCarty rose. "I'll have a word with the Inspector first and maybe put a flea in his ear, for the fellow that's on his way to New Orleans could find out more if he knew what he was looking for. Many a person in this world is paying blackmail to protect another, or their memory, and Mrs. Jarvis, God rest her soul, may be as innocent as a babe of any connection herself with what she was trying to keep quiet, and yet the disgrace of it coming out might reflect on her in some way. The Inspector can only tell me I'm an old fool for my pains; he's likely to at that, for he's all swelled up over his own notion of the murder, but if he does——"

"What'll you do?" asked Dennis with a sly grin as the other paused. "You're not Officer 804 now, my bucko; you're a gentleman, with a landed estate on your hands——"

"I'll go it alone, and ask odds of nobody!" McCarty retorted grimly. "On the force or off it, I'm going to see the case through! Why was I there on the spot when the dead woman's body was found if it hadn't been meant for me to take a hand in finding out who killed her?"

To this fatalistic query Dennis had no reply and McCarty sallied forth to Headquarters.

He found Inspector Druet in a jubilant frame of mind.

"Well, Mac, I guess we'll land our fish, all right!" the latter exclaimed. "You wouldn't listen yesterday, but I

knew I hadn't made any mistake! Oliver Jarvis is the man!"

"Is that so, sir?" McCarty remarked, unmoved. "You've found out what he's been doing with his wife's money, then?"

"Better than that! We've got a witness who saw him leaving his own house at six o'clock on Friday afternoon, and located the taxi chauffeur who picked him up five minutes later just around the corner and drove him to the French consulate at top speed. What do you say to that?"

"'Twas good, snappy work, sir, but it don't prove anything." McCarty's chin was a trifle out-thrust. "He may have been in the house and yet not seen his wife or gone near her dressing-room——"

"Mac, what's the matter with you?" the Inspector demanded, disgustedly. "You're getting to be as stubborn as a mule! You can't get around facts, man, and every fact we've got hold of points to Oliver Jarvis."

"Except that according to your one witness, the dressing-room was in order until eight o'clock or after," McCarty remarked.

"Margot's story was a lie!"

"Was it so, sir?" McCarty's tone was quiet, but his blue eyes snapped. "Have you considered it for a minute as maybe true, in spite of the fact that it would upset your theory? Suppose Mrs. Jarvis was not carried out of that house, but walked out, after getting rid of her own servants so that nobody should know where she'd gone; suppose she took one of husband's gloves with her, meaning to take the pair, so that her finger marks would not show in what she was going to do? Suppose she went through the yards, put up the ladder and climbed it, forced the museum window——"

"You're crazy, Mac!" the Inspector stared. "Why

should Mrs. Jarvis have gone secretly to a place where she was always welcome? What could she have been after?"

"I'm thinking it was a black wallet with a couple of letters inside," McCarty responded simply.

"Look here! What are you getting at?" The Inspector struck his desk smartly with his open hand. "It's a fool notion, but you'd better come across with what is on your mind. I suppose you mean that she was murdered in the museum, after all?"

McCarty nodded solemnly.

"Well, she wasn't," the other asserted flatly. "You'll be as bad as Terhune next, trying to say that Marchal killed her! What is this rubbish about a black wallet?"

"'Tis not rubbish about her being blackmailed, is it, sir? Nor yet that she seemed to be happy lately, as if a load were off her mind, only to collapse on Wednesday after the dinner party; after learning from Mr. Norwood that he'd just bought a wallet that held the only clue to a certain crime that's never been cleared up. Unless I've got the wrong bull by the horns, that wallet had something to do with why she'd been blackmailed, and she made up her mind to get it if she had to steal it. That's all, Inspector. I don't pretend to say who killed her, nor why, but whoever it was, he picked the lock of the museum door with a spider; the marks are there for you to see."

Inspector Druet snorted in good-natured contempt.

"There were letters in this wallet? What was the crime they were supposed to furnish a clue to?"

"The Hoyos matter, sir. You asked me yesterday what souvenir of it Mr. Norwood has and I told you none. It's gospel truth, too, for the wallet has disappeared. He swears it was there in the museum at three o'clock on Friday afternoon, before he left for the professor's house."

"The Hoyos case! Ten years back, and Mrs. Jarvis only came to New York five years ago!" laughed the Inspector. "You'll have to think up a better one than that, Mac! Old Norwood probably mislaid the wallet himself, if it ever existed. When did he miss it?"

McCarty hesitated.

"Only yesterday, sir," he admitted. "But none except your own men and the medical examiners were in that room till it was locked up on Saturday night. 'Twas taken away by the fellow that killed Mrs. Jarvis——"

"No, Mac. You're away off," the Inspector interrupted, shaking his head. "You had good common sense when you were on the force, but you're letting your imagination run away with you. Whatever Mrs. Jarvis was blackmailed for, it had nothing to do with any crime nor with her death."

"Well, sir, I've nothing to do with the case; I'm only giving you a tip and you can take it or leave it, as you see fit." McCarty spoke with dignity. "If your operative that's gone to New Orleans would work along the lines I've told you, and try to find out what connection there was between this man Hoyos and Mrs. Jarvis or her family you might learn something that would bring you around to my way of thinking."

"I'm afraid not, Mac. There isn't a shadow of evidence to support such a theory and a million reasons why it would be impossible on the face of it. I thought you had something up your sleeve yesterday, when you came nosing around about that old Hoyos record; but I didn't think you would fall for any such wild idea as this. Old Norwood must have hypnotized you with his fool collection, but if you want to monkey with the case at all, come down to earth! Facts are what we're after, not crazy theories, and we're working for practical results."

"Well, sir, I'll be getting on." McCarty rose, his face expressionless. "I've had my say and I'll take up no more of your valuable time, only I'll ask you to remember that I gave you the word. If you want me you'll know where to find me."

He clapped on his hat and strode out, unmindful of the look of amused affection which his former superior cast after him. He was more hurt than he would admit even to himself. It was not so much the fact that his theory had been rejected but the manner of it that stung him like a whip-lash. The tolerant indulgence of the Inspector's attitude he recognized from long association as that which the official habitually adopted toward harmless cranks and the army of amateur sleuths who besieged Headquarters with weird suggestions and theories during the investigation of every case to which wide publicity had been given.

The long friendship and camaraderie which had existed between them was forgotten in that bitter moment and McCarty's honest heart swelled with wrathful indignation. So the Inspector thought him an old has-been, past his usefulness, who had to be humored because of his past record, like a horse turned out to grass! He'd show him! Into the purely professional aspect of the investigation there had entered a new and personal element; his vindication, his reinstatement in the eyes of his former superior and his own self-respect depended alike upon the result of his efforts now. The Jarvis case had assumed all at once the proportions of a challenge and McCarty's spirit rose doggedly to meet it. As he had assured Dennis, he would ask odds of nobody, least of all the Inspector; he would go it alone and prove his case or forever more mind his own business and eschew the affairs of the department.

The rest of the morning was spent in a fruitless round of the agencies which specialized in supplying stewardesses

for yachts and passenger liners. The name of Kate Stricker was not upon their books, nor known save in one instance, when the manager recalled her as having unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a position two years before. She had besieged the office for weeks during that period and seemed a capable woman with first-class references, but war conditions had cut down the maritime passenger service and even yachting had declined.

A judicious display of liberality on McCarty's part caused the canceled register to be laid before him and he ascertained Kate Stricker's address at that time to have been in West One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street.

His ire at the Inspector's attitude had given place to a philosophical mood, but his determination was undaunted and after a brief respite for lunch, he hied himself to the address given at the agency, not forgetting the admonition to "ring Meggs' bell."

The house proved to be one a row of cheap apartments and Mrs. Meggs, a trim but worn little wisp of a woman, ushered him into a brightly scoured kitchen and readily met his query.

"Kate? Oh, yes, sir. She doesn't stop with me now; hasn't for more than a year, but we're great friends and she drops in often to see me. She was here only last week. What was it you wanted of her, sir?"

"If she's not working now, there's a berth open on a big private yacht that I'd like to engage her for," McCarty lied glibly. "The agency where she registered two years ago sent me here and I'll be thankful to you if you'll tell me where I can find her."

Mrs. Meggs shook her head.

"Kate's not looking for anything to do right now," she remarked. "She's come into a bit of money and she's resting for awhile. Times have been hard with her lately,

especially since the war started, and for a long while she was out of a position. That was when she lodged here with me. She couldn't get anything to do at sea and finally she took a position as assistant to the matron of the orphan asylum over on the heights. She lost it, though, three or four months ago and I never laid eyes on her until she came last week and paid me every cent she'd owed me. I don't believe she would go to sea again now, sir."

"Still, this is such a fine easy berth that she might consider it," McCarty urged discreetly. "The manager of the agency said she was just the one for the job and you'd like to put it her way, I'm sure. She can do no more than refuse it."

"That's true," the woman agreed. "She told me she was staying with a friend, a Mrs. Williamson over on Park Avenue near a Hundred and Seventeenth Street, but that she was going away somewhere for a rest at the seaside. Kate has a rare craze for the ocean, sir, which is natural, since she's spent most of her life on it. That's why I think perhaps she might ship with you in spite of the money that's come to her, but I can't tell you rightly where to find her, for I don't remember the house number she gave me. She said she'd write, anyway, when she got settled somewhere."

McCarty thanked his informant and took his departure, threading a devious way across the city to Park Avenue. There a prolonged scrutiny of the mail boxes in various vestibules in the neighborhood of One Hundred and Seventeenth Street at length vouchsafed the name he sought, and he pressed the bell.

The entrance door clicked promptly in response, and he mounted the stairs to find a buxom young woman facing him in the dim hallway, with a baby in her arms and a toddler clinging shyly to her skirt.

"Miss Stricker's gone away," the young woman simpered in reply to his question. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"Yes, ma'am," McCarty responded promptly. "I've lost track of her lately, since she quit the orphan asylum and I thought I'd look her up. My name's Carter; I make no doubt you've heard her speak of me."

Mrs. Williamson shook her head.

"No, I can't say as I have, but Kate was always sly about her gentlemen friends. If you want to write to her, she's at the Oceanside Cottage, at Atlantic City. I suppose you know she's had money left her?"

"I did not, but I'm glad to hear it," retorted McCarty, avoiding the shrewd glance of the woman's small, mercenary eyes. "Thanks for the address, ma'am, and if you write to her, I'll be grateful if you'll say that John Carter was asking after her."

He bowed and turning, strode down the stairs and out into the wintry day once more, his steps buoyant with elation. He had scarcely dared hope for such definite news at the outset of his quest, but the old luck still held as an augury of ultimate success, and he resolved to put it to the test without loss of time.

He hastened home to look up trains and pack a bag, but as he paused on the steps outside the street door fishing for his keys, a voice hailed him from the threshold of the antique shop.

"Oh, I say, there you are, McCarty! We've had a jolly good wait for you!"

Wheeling about, he beheld the Englishman, Eric Vivaseur.

"You were wanting to see me, sir?" he asked in astonishment.

"Right-o. Miss Norwood is here. She would like a word with you."

At that moment the face of Joan Norwood, pale now and clouded with troubled agitation, appeared over his shoulder and she cried:

“Oh, Mr. McCarty! I’m so glad you’ve come! I—I want your help!”

CHAPTER XVI

“IT WAS NOT MY DOING ”

MCCARTY ushered his unexpected guests up the stairs to his sitting-room and hid his amazement beneath a bustling effort to make them comfortable.

“By Jove, you do yourself well here, don’t you?” Vivaseur glanced about him at the array of books and cigar boxes, the huge desk, the phonograph in the corner, the shabby, capacious leather chairs drawn up before the grate in which a bed of coals glowed redly, and the soft gray tones of the single picture which hung above. “That is a very good print you have there, McCarty, but I should have fancied your taste ran to a more sporting trend.”

There was a shade of patronage in his voice and McCarty replied with dignity:

“’Tis a picture of his mother by a guy called Whistler and I bought it because it minded me of my own, God rest her soul. I am not a sporting man, Mr. Vivaseur. Since I resigned from the force I’ve done nothing more exciting than a bit of fishing now and then.” He turned to the young girl. “What did you want of me, miss? I’ll be glad to do anything I can.”

“I don’t know quite how to begin.” Joan Norwood sat twisting the gold chain of her purse nervously between her fingers. “Uncle Cal has talked so much of you that I thought you would be the one to come to——”

“Perhaps I can tell you what ^{is} on Miss Norwood’s

mind," Vivaseur interrupted quickly. The momentary patronage was gone from his tones and he spoke with tactful deference. "We came to you because of your influence with the authorities and because Miss Norwood feels, as I do, that if anyone succeeds in solving the mystery of her friend's tragic death, it will be you, my dear fellow!"

"I'm not on the case, sir," McCarty responded quietly. "I've no longer any connection with the force, as you know, and it's little the influence I have there."

"But we know your record!" Vivaseur's smile was winning in its frank, boyish admiration. "Mr. Norwood has told us of your ripping work on a case only last year, and Miss Norwood felt that if you would interest yourself in this affair you would stand a greater show of success than that scientific johnny. He's been about messing things up generally to-day and the old gentleman is in a fearful heat about it."

"Inspector Druet has charge of the investigation," McCarty remarked in a slightly mollified voice.

"Yes. Quite so." Vivaseur shrugged. "I don't want to cast any aspersions on your late profession, McCarty, but after all it is the individual and not the system that counts, don't you think? Your very conscientious Inspector is raising the deuce with all of us, and one of Miss Norwood's motives in coming to you was to enlist your influence to have this espionage to which we are being subjected modified a trifle. I have no personal objection, though, by Jove! I wish they'd be a bit more subtle in their methods. All the chaps at the club are spoofing me about the johnny who is trailing me. However, it is a serious annoyance to Miss Norwood and her uncle and we fancied if you put in a word——"

McCarty shook his head.

"That's the ordinary routine work of the department,

sir, in a case like this. I couldn't interfere, but likely the Inspector will put a stop to it himself soon, for he told me only yesterday that he expected nothing from it.”

Miss Norwood leaned forward in her chair.

“That isn't the real reason why I persuaded Mr. Vivaseur to bring me here to-day, Mr. McCarty,” she said earnestly. “Of course, this being followed about is annoying and makes Uncle Cal very difficult to live with, but I wouldn't mind anything if I could only feel that some progress was being made in the investigation, if only we could know who really killed poor Evelyn Jarvis. Oliver has the utmost faith in Mr. Terhune, but his suspicion of Captain Marchal is unjust and utterly without foundation. It is almost cowardly to attack a person in the Captain's position, suffering as he is under such a terrible affliction and absolutely innocent! I had hoped that the authorities would make some headway, but they seem even more willfully blind than Mr. Terhune. Inspector Druet is actually trying to build up a case against Oliver Jarvis himself! They are both dreadfully wrong and the thought that precious time is passing, and that the fiend who killed my friend may escape scot free is driving me almost frantic! I loved Evelyn as if she were my own sister and I shall not rest until her murderer is discovered and brought to justice!”

“He will be,” McCarty announced with a certain grimness. “Of course, Mr. Terhune is a very celebrated man, but his methods are not those of the department and naturally I've more faith in the old system. The Inspector may be on the wrong track, but he'll never give up until he learns the truth, I'll say that for him.”

“And then it may be too late!” Miss Norwood wrung her hands. “Mr. McCarty, I know you have retired, that you're a private citizen now, but that leaves you all the more free to conduct an investigation of your own,

if you only will do so. I've come to ask you to undertake it for me. I can never be happy again while this horrible thought hangs over me, and I know how clever you are; I know that if anyone can find Evelyn's murderer, you can! There will be no difficulty about money, I—I have a great deal, and I would cheerfully give half I possess to learn the truth."

"It's not money that would tempt me to get in the game again, Miss Norwood," McCarty responded gravely. "I've had an interest in the case from the start and I'm of the same opinion as yourself; that both Mr. Terhune and the Inspector are barking up the wrong trees. However, I would not take up the case as a professional matter, though I thank you kindly for the offer. I'm a has-been, and I'll not be setting up shop in competition with Mr. Terhune and the department, but it just happens that I've a private reason for wanting to see this thing through. There's a matter of personal satisfaction in it and I may as well tell you that I've already decided to investigate it on my own account, miss, and I'll no more quit than Inspector Druet himself until I've come at the truth, if it's within the power of mortal man."

"Good!" Vivaseur exclaimed, his face alight with enthusiasm as he extended his hand. "You're a chap after my own heart, McCarty! This will be a load off Miss Norwood's mind, and if I can do anything to help, you may count on me. I'm an awful duffer, I'm afraid, at this sort of thing, for it's a bit out of my line; crime, and all that, but I'll be glad to give you a hand if you'll call on me."

"You are really going to do it?" Miss Norwood breathed. "I can't tell you how thankful I am, Mr. McCarty, and relieved, too, that you don't suspect either Captain Marchal or Mr. Jarvis, for now I can speak freely. There is so much going on at home that I don't understand, something

queer in the attitude of nearly everybody, and I don't know what to think. Perhaps if I tell you, you will be able to make something of it. There are other points, too; little things I remember about Evelyn, chance remarks that puzzled me at the time and come back to me now with redoubled significance.”

“I wish you would tell me, Miss Norwood.” McCarty hitched his chair closer. “’Twill be a great help, and if you and Mr. Vivaseur will both keep your eyes open and let me know what happens you may go a long way toward discovering the truth. Now, what is it that's going on at your home? What's bothering you in the manner of everybody?”

“Well, to begin with, there's Uncle Cal,” she replied. “He was dreadfully excited last night, but I supposed it was the reaction from the funeral and his indignation at being followed about. He ate scarcely any dinner, and after Mr. Vivaseur had gone I heard him talking to himself in the library. I went in to him, but he sent me off to bed as though I were a little girl again. Hours after I wakened and felt uneasy, I don't know why. It must have been terribly late, nearly morning. I saw a light downstairs and crept down, and what do you think I found Uncle Cal doing? Upsetting his whole museum! Everything was topsy-turvy and he was in the midst of it, ransacking drawers and turning the contents of the cases out upon the floor in a hopeless jumble. He was so absorbed that he never heard me, and I tip-toed back to my room without disturbing him.

“This morning the museum door was locked and Uncle Cal looked quite worn out; dazed, too, as though he had had a shock of some sort. He was full of enthusiasm before the investigation, and could talk of nothing else, but now he refuses to discuss it and seems to shrink if it is men-

tioned in his presence. I can't help feeling that he knows or suspects something, but he acts almost afraid to speak."

McCarty nodded slowly.

"I've a notion that I know what's troubling him," he commented. "But go on, miss. There was something else——"

"Captain Marchal," she paused. "You know how ill he was yesterday; he seems to be quite himself again to-day, but terribly weak and shaken, and his manner is so constrained and queer that even Mr. Vivaseur noticed it and he has never had even five minutes' conversation with him."

"Rather!" the Englishman ejaculated. "Of course, I admire him tremendously and all that for what he has done, and I'm no end sorry for him in his affliction, but my word! he is an uncomfortable sort of chap to have about! He has his ears cocked, if you know what I mean, as if he were listening to something no one else can hear, and those sightless eyes of his seem to follow one about in the most extraordinary way. Gives one a deucedly odd sensation, don't you know?"

"I believe you, sir!" McCarty responded with emphasis. "Did he know 'twas me sat with him yesterday, I wonder?"

"Yes. Uncle Cal told him and he seemed to be rather annoyed about it, and anxious to know if he had given you any trouble," Joan Norwood responded. "Then Mr. Terhune came and insisted upon seeing him this morning. They had an interview in the drawing-room and I think Mr. Terhune must have virtually accused him, for I saw Uncle Cal listening in the hall and all at once he burst in upon them and there was a fearful row, he defending Captain Marchal and abusing Mr. Terhune in the most violent manner and finally ordering him out of the house. After

he had gone Uncle Cal persuaded the Captain to go to bed and rest, and he did look frightfully ill when I passed him on the stairs, but he pulled himself together and came down again at lunch time, although he ate nothing. I can feel his queer, strained attitude, just as Mr. Vivaseur can, and although his manners are perfect, as always, it makes me uncomfortable, ill at ease. He was never like this before. Then, right after lunch, the worst thing happened of all.”

“And what was that?” McCarty asked eagerly.

“Oliver Jarvis came and said that he expected to be arrested for the murder himself! That Inspector Druet had been questioning him in such a way he could not help but realize he was suspected, preposterous as it appeared, and he wanted Uncle Cal to arrange his affairs for him in the event of his being taken into custody. We all thought he was crazy at first, that his grief had affected his mind, but he told us enough to convince us the Inspector was actually laboring under the delusion that he had killed poor Evelyn. You see, they have discovered a discrepancy in his story of where and how he spent Friday afternoon. He had told them that he went directly from his attorneys to the French consulate, when, as a matter of fact, there was an interval of an hour and a half just at the time when the murder is supposed to have taken place, which he said nothing about.”

“Why doesn’t he tell the truth now?” McCarty spoke with studied carelessness.

“Because it would make the case look even blacker against him, in the Inspector’s eyes.” Miss Norwood hesitated and then went on quickly: “You see, they’ve discovered that he went back to his house that afternoon; someone saw him leave and take a taxi to the consulate. If he admitted now that he had quarreled with his wife——”

"Quarreled with her?" McCarty ejaculated.

"Yes. That is what has made his grief so difficult to bear, poor boy, and he simply couldn't speak of it to anyone before. It was just a tiny quarrel, but the thought that they parted in coolness after five years of ideal happiness is driving him almost mad! It was about money, too. Oliver has lost a huge amount in the last year or two on the stock market, and some of it was his wife's. She knew, of course, and never blamed him, but she was almost fanatical about this reconstruction work in France, and wanted to throw nearly all of her remaining capital into it. Oliver did not think it wise, under the circumstances, and they had a final argument about it on Friday after lunch. Oliver says he kissed her good-by, but it was a cold sort of kiss and she did not respond. It worried him all during his interview with his attorneys and afterward he went up and walked in the park and fought it out with himself.

"He told us that his first impulse was to give way to her wishes, but his recent experiences in Wall Street had shaken his confidence in himself and his ability to make money, and common sense dictated that his wife's fortune must be conserved; that she must be protected and provided for, even against her quixotic desires. He longed to make up with her, though, and started home, but in the very vestibule of the house he stopped himself, afraid lest in his softened mood if she pleaded with him he would give in to her against his better judgment. If the person who saw him apparently coming out of his house had been watching a minute or two earlier, they would have seen him arrive, pause in the vestibule and then turn and go down the steps and away. That is the truth, Mr. McCarty, but you can realize what little hope he would have of convincing Inspector Druet of it."

A sound note remotely resembling a chuckle issued from

McCarty's lips, but the next moment his gravity had returned.

“Not now, maybe, but I don't think there's danger of his arrest; not right away, at least. The Inspector is cautious by nature, and he'll not risk charging Mr. Jarvis with the murder till he's got more evidence than that to go upon. I don't know but I'd tell the truth, at that, if I was Mr. Jarvis. It'll give the Inspector something to think about and if it could be proved to him that Mrs. Jarvis knew of her husband's speculations and the loss of her money the theory he's been working on would be knocked into a cocked hat.”

“Oh, do you think so?” Miss Norwood cried. “I'll tell him! Mr. Terhune advised him to admit nothing, but privately I think that is just because he is sure of his own case and wants to make his triumph all the more effective by permitting the police to blunder, no matter what mental anguish it causes his client.”

This time McCarty's chuckle was unrestrained.

“A grand-stand play! 'Tis like him!” he affirmed. “However, miss, if you can persuade Mr. Jarvis to go straight to Inspector Druet with his story, just as you've told it to me, 'twill be better for him in the end. Tell him to be sure and explain how he lost the money and Mrs. Jarvis not blaming him, and to say that it's by McCarty's advice he's making a clean breast of it. I've small influence, as I told you, but the Inspector knows me and he'll at least take the trouble to investigate before he goes any further.”

“I can persuade Oliver, I am sure.” Miss Norwood's voice was buoyant with relief, but her expression changed swiftly as she added: “Now I want to tell you about Evelyn herself, Mr. McCarty. My uncle told me about the cake marked 'Noel' and the macaroni-paste letters which were

found hidden in her room, but I suspected even before the cake could have been sent to her that there was some old trouble in her life that clouded her happiness, and last spring I was almost certain, from something she let fall in an unguarded moment, that she was being hounded by someone but I did not think of blackmail. Remember that I was closer to her than anyone in the world except her husband; possibly even more in her confidence in some ways, for she did not feel the need of so much self-repression with me.

"I cannot recall the moment when I first began to suspect that Evelyn had some secret trouble, but I found her sad and depressed often in the past few years without any apparent cause, and one subject seemed forever back of her mind, predominant over everything else; how alone each one of us stood in this world no matter how much love we were surrounded with, and the martyrdom of being unable to reveal oneself fully. I thought at first that it was just a morbid mood, but it recurred so persistently that at length I begged her to tell me what was troubling her. She broke down and cried terribly, but it seemed to relieve her and she put me off with vague excuses.

"That was some time before the holidays last year, but immediately after Christmas I noticed the change in her. She was afraid, Mr. McCarty; I did not know of what, but she lived in a constant state of nervous apprehension which increased as time went on until she became actually ill. That was in May, I think. I was sitting with her one day when she fell into a little doze and then started up in terror. "Go away!" she cried, flinging her hands out as if to ward off something. "It was not my doing! Must the shadow of it follow me always, always!"

"I spoke to her and she quieted at once and murmured something about a bad dream but she could not deceive me.

The hunted look in her eyes was too real and it was the same look, only intensified, that I had seen for months past.”

Eric Vivaseur stirred in his chair.

“Don’t you think, my dear girl, that you may be exaggerating a trifle?” he suggested. “Isn’t it because of what has come to light now, don’t you know, that you attach too much significance to it? That whole affair of the cake and those letters is a bit thick, really! I should fancy it was some sort of bally practical joke, if you know what I mean. A blackmailing johnny in real life wouldn’t go about it in such a silly fashion, now would he? It simply isn’t done, you know.”

He appealed to McCarty, but the latter shook his head.

“There’s stranger things than that pulled off, sir,” he remarked. “I’m afraid there’s no doubt of it that Mrs. Jarvis was being blackmailed, and ’twas far from being a joke!”

“But on what score?” the other demanded. “I say, have you any idea, McCarty, of what possible secret could be in the lady’s life? From what I have heard of her, she seems to have been quite all right. Have you discovered the slightest shadow on her past?”

McCarty regarded the Englishman meditatively for a moment and then replied with an assumption of candor.

“No, Mr. Vivaseur. I’ve no notion of what it could be but I’m going to do my best to find out.”

“I am sure you will.” Miss Norwood rose and held out her hand. “I feel so relieved at having had this talk with you, Mr. McCarty, and to hear that you mean to carry on the investigation. I know that you will succeed, you will learn the truth; and we shall welcome it whatever it brings.”

“I’ll try hard enough,” McCarty assured her. “You’ll let me know, miss, if anything else happens?”

She promised and they departed, McCarty following his guests to the head of the stairs.

"I say, here's a letter for you." Vivaseur called back from below. "I'll toss it up to you—Ah! Sorry it fell short! Good-afternoon."

When the door had closed behind them McCarty picked up his letter and returned to the sitting-room, where he dropped into a chair and sat for long buried in deep cogitation. Miss Norwood's story had not wholly surprised him, but with its termination a thought had come which, wildly improbable as his earlier inspirations had been, yet held him fascinated by its sheer audacity.

Dusk had fallen when he at last remembered the letter in his hands, and stirring up the dying coals upon the hearth, he tore open the envelope.

"Deer Mr. McCarty," he read. "Are you busy tonight? I will be at the basment door at half past 8. I am in troubel. Yours truly, Etta."

CHAPTER XVII

ONE WORD

IT was a very pale and agitated Etta who awaited McCarty's coming at the hour designated that night. Her buxom figure drooped and her face in the flaring light of the street lamp looked swollen and distorted as from much weeping.

"Good-evening, my dear," McCarty saluted her with marked gallantry. "I got your note and it's proud I am that you sent for me in your trouble, whatever it is. Would you come for a little walk, maybe?"

He had noted that she wore her hat and cloak and at his words she nodded and slipping out of the area door, closed it noiselessly behind her.

"Yes. We can't talk here, and the house gives me the creeps, anyway. It was good of you to come, Mr. McCarty, but I dunno as I did right to send for you. He'd half kill me if he knew I was giving him away, even though you've nothing to do with the police now. Still we've got to know what to do or I'll go crazy with the worry of it!"

"If it's a police matter I can put you right on it in no time. There's no trick of the trade I'm not on to," McCarty replied promptly. "Is it a friend of yours that's in trouble?"

"It's my brother, Dick." The words came low and half unwillingly from her lips and McCarty with difficulty repressed a whistle of astonishment.

Her brother! Norwood's description of the young man

returned to his mind: "lazy, impudent, drank up everything he could lay his hand on——"

"I've heard of him," he said slowly. "Mr. Jarvis employed him as second man at one time, didn't he?"

"Yes, and you've heard no good of him, I'll be bound!" Etta retorted fiercely. "Dick never had a fair show! He's not really bad; not any worse than a lot of other young men, but he's had hard luck and he can't keep a steady job and it gets him crazy to think of the soft snap the rich have of it, while he and the likes of us have to slave and take their abuse just for enough to eat and something to put on our backs! Dick tried to go straight, but something always seemed to go wrong. When he worked for the Jarvise's old Henry, the butler, was jealous of him and forever complaining to the master. Of course, Dick wasn't going to stand having all the old man's work put off on his shoulders and take his jawing too, besides! Then Henry told Mr. Jarvis that Dick was drinking up his whisky, which was a lie, but Mr. Jarvis wouldn't listen and discharged him."

"And now he's in trouble?" McCarty suggested to stem the flow of reminiscence.

"Yes, through no fault of his own. He got in with a gang over on the East Side; not gunmen, but tough, young fellows that—that put notions in his head and showed him easy ways of getting money." She hesitated. "I've begged him on my knees to cut loose from them, but what was the use? There was no one to give him a job or a good word. I went to Mrs. Jarvis to see if she could get her husband to give him another trial, but she wouldn't do anything for me; that Margot had her wrapped around her little finger and she had no more use for me than she had for my brother, though my aunt was cook in the Jarvis family before Mr. Oliver ever knew she was alive!"

The vindictive resentment in the girl's tone was a revelation, but McCarty commented soothingly:

"'Twas hard lines on the young fellow. But what's happened to him?"

"The other night a watchman at some foundry was beaten up and a lot of brass work, fixtures and such, was stolen." Etta dropped her voice and glanced half-fearfully over her shoulder as she spoke. "The police traced them to a place downtown, a fence who made a business of buying up such stuff and asking no questions. He talked quick enough to the police, though, and said it was the gang Dick belongs to that turned the trick. I dunno whether it was or not, but Dick wasn't in on it, that I can swear! However, the watchman woke up in the hospital and identified two of the crowd as them that had set on him, describing another that sounded enough like Dick to be his brother. The fellows wouldn't squeal and tell who'd been with them and so the police went scouting around and last night they—they found Dick and arrested him!"

"Well," observed McCarty after a pause. "My advice to him would be to get a good lawyer that stands in, maybe, with the Prosecutor, and a couple of witnesses that don't come too high. You can get them to swear to anything for from five up."

"You wouldn't be doing much, would you, and Dick with no money nor nothing!" Etta jeered sarcastically. "Besides, he had nothing to do with it. He wasn't with them that night and didn't even know what was coming off!"

McCarty glanced shrewdly at her.

"Then why don't he tell the police where he was?"

"He—he can't. That's the trouble, and I dunno what to do. I know where he was, all right, but if I was to tell, it would get him in worse trouble, and me, too."

At her words a sudden light flashed across McCarty's brain and he demanded:

"When was it that the foundry was broke into? Last Friday night?"

The girl made no reply, but he could feel her tremble violently as she withdrew her arm from his.

"You might just as well tell me, my dear, for I can find out from Headquarters, and remember, I'm your friend. I told you'd I'd stand by you. 'Twas last Friday night, wasn't it?"

"Y-yes!" Etta began to sob wildly. "I'll not tell you any more, so don't ask it of me! I never meant to let out that much, but you dragged it from me!"

"You don't have to tell me," McCarty retorted. "'Twas your brother who ransacked Mrs. Jarvis' dressing-room and you that let him in to do it, wasn't it? You'd put up a job between you——"

"We had not!" The girl turned upon him with flashing eyes. "Dick was sick! Cigarettes and drink and the tough life here in the city was getting him and he wanted a chance to go West and start all over again, but where was the money coming from? He's all I've got, and I didn't mean to see him die here or maybe go up for turning some cheap trick like pinching a few bits of brass! He'd as much right to a fresh start as anyone and if the Jarvises had been the open-handed kind he would have gone to them. They'd never missed the few dollars, and 'twould have been only decent, him being the cook's nephew, and all. But we knew he didn't stand a chance of getting a cent from them, and here they were going off to Europe this week and turning me out with a reference, maybe, but nothing to show for the year and more I've slaved for them! Margot was going with them, Margot was the pet, but I was no more than the dirt under their feet! My aunt was to get a pension, but they've

turned her against Dick, too, and she'd have nothing to do with him.

"Dick and me, we talked it all over and I was near wild, for his health had been breaking fast lately. A few of the trumpery pins and things that Mrs. Jarvis used to leave around so careless on her dresser would have paid his way to the coast and set him up in the billiard parlor he's been wanting to run, but I wouldn't hear of it first off when he spoke. I told him to come back the next night and we'd think up some other way, but in the meantime that sneaking Margot went to Mrs. Jarvis with some tale about me breaking a homely old vase in the drawing-room and I got scolded right in front of her. That settled it for me, and I thought that if I could get her in trouble it would only be paying her back!"

"I see," McCarty nodded. "You thought if anything was missed she'd be accused of taking it. You didn't know your brother was going to pull the dressing-room to pieces, nor yet did you figure on the murder——"

"Oh-h!" Etta gave a little scream and clutched convulsively at his arm. "Mr. McCarty, as God is my judge we had nothing to do with that! I never liked Mrs. Jarvis for the way she put Margot before me, but I'd not have harmed a hair of her head, nor Dick either! He's that tender-hearted he wouldn't hurt a cat, for all his rough ways, and Mrs. Jarvis was gone before ever I let him into the house. I can swear to that for I stayed by him every minute he was there, keeping watch that Margot didn't hear anything and come snooping around. Except for her down in the front basement the house was empty."

"And what time was it when you let your brother in?" McCarty asked. "You'd better tell me the whole thing, Etta, till I see if I can't fix a way out of it for you. Aiding and abetting a burglary is a serious matter, but I've influence

at Headquarters yet and you don't want to keep silent and have your brother sent up for something he didn't do. That toothache business was a bluff, wasn't it?"

"Partly, but I was sick, anyway, with the thought of what I'd agreed to. I must have been crazy, looking back on it, but I'd been getting more and more sore about Margot and the way I was going to be turned off. I knew there'd be no one home Friday night but the two of us, and when she brought up my supper I told her I was going to sleep so as to get rid of her. Dick came at nine, and I was waiting for him up at the front door. I let him in quiet and then all at once a different feeling came over me and I begged him to give it up and go away; I saw 'twas wrong, what we had planned.

"But Dick had been drinking to nerve himself up and he wouldn't quit like that. He was bound to go through with it, and upstairs he went with me after him. I took him through Mrs. Jarvis' rooms to the dressing-room and then I went back to the door leading into the hall to watch and listen for Margot. Mrs. Jarvis wasn't there, anywhere. Whatever had happened to her, she'd been gone long before."

"And Margot didn't hear the racket when your brother began upsetting things?"

"No. My heart was in my mouth, but 'tis an old house and the floors are thick. When I heard the bang of a chair going over I ran back and stopped him. He was mad with rage at not finding anything except the gold stuff on the dresser, and he didn't dare take that, not knowing how to get rid of it without letting the gang in on it. 'Twas all I could do to calm him down and make him go quietly, but I got him out at last, and I never was so thankful for anything in my life! I was glad even that he'd got nothing, and we'd no theft on our souls! I hadn't the nerve to go

back into that room and straighten it up for fear Margot would catch me at it and see the safe open, that I didn't know how to close. I didn't care, either, for with Dick gone and me supposed to be sick upstairs they'd never put the blame of it on me, and they could think what they liked."

"Do you know what time it was when your brother left the house?"

"I flew straight back to my room and the clock pointed to half-past nine." Etta responded, adding anxiously: "Oh, Mr. McCarty, whatever shall we do?"

"There's only one thing for you to do, and that is to go to Inspector Druet yourself and tell him the truth." McCarty smiled oddly to himself in the darkness. "Tell him I sent you and he'll do what he can to get you both off."

"Him!" the girl exclaimed scornfully. "After the way he roared at me the other day? I think I see myself! He'd be the first to clap me in jail and goodness knows but he'd charge us both with the murder!"

"You've got him wrong," McCarty urged earnestly. "He was only trying to get at the truth, that you were holding out on him, and if you'd told him then, your brother would not be facing the charge he is now. He'll go up, as sure as you're alive, if you don't speak, and you needn't fear being accused of the murder, for Mrs. Jarvis had been dead three hours and more when you let your brother into the house. He didn't break in, nor did he take anything, so there's no question of robbery, after all, and even if the Inspector should be a bit hard on him I know one that'll put in a good word, and that's Mr. Jarvis himself."

"Why should he?" Etta demanded. "He was mean enough to him before. If I do tell, Mr. McCarty, and they don't let my brother go——"

"They will. Tell the Inspector I said for you to go straight to him and that he would fix it to get you both out of the scrape."

Etta wavered, but McCarty called all his powers of persuasion into play, and when he left her at the basement door of the Jarvis house a half hour later he had wrung from her a reluctant promise to go with her confession to Inspector Druet on the following day.

"Twice I've scored on him!" he chuckled to himself as he turned up his collar once more and started across town. "And neither time did I have to lift my little finger! The news came to me; first young Jarvis' alibi and now the matter of the dressing-room. The Inspector has the department behind him and Terhune has his science, but I've my luck, praise God, and it's going strong!"

An hour later, as engine 023 honked its way wearily into the firehouse after a futile dash to a false alarm, Dennis swung himself down from his appointed place to find McCarty confronting him, suitcase in hand and the light of purpose in his eyes.

"You're off on a trip, the night?" Dennis regarded him wistfully. "My eyes have been bothering me again from smoke and only to-day the Lieutenant said he could fix it for me to lay off for a week and rest up. If you'd given me the word, Mac, I could have been with you."

"Tis hardly worth while," McCarty rejoined. "I'm off to Atlantic City on the midnight train and if I get what I'm after I'll be back to-morrow night or the next day. Save up your eyes, Denny, till next week for I'm thinking we've a longer trip ahead of us then. I just stopped in to tell you that I'm on my way to see Kate Stricker."

"The woman that sold the wallet to Norwood!" Dennis stared. "You've located her then? Good for you!"

McCarty nodded.

"And shot the Inspector's grand little theory full of holes," he supplemented complacently. "Wait till you hear what happened since I left you this morning!"

He recounted the events of the day and Dennis listened in absorbed interest, thrilling in sympathetic indignation at Inspector Druet's attitude and jubilant over the thought of that official's coming surprise.

"You've put it over on him, though 'twas none of your doing!" he declared when the story was finished. "You had the right hunch about Etta, too. I hope it's still working now that those little matters are cleared up and you're out for the real dope!"

"None of my doing," McCarty repeated musingly. "That's what Mrs. Jarvis said."

"What's that?" Dennis asked, startled.

"It's what she said when Miss Norwood was sitting by her that time last spring that I just told you about, when she started up from her bed. 'It was none of my doing,' and 'why must the shadow of it follow me?' If I can get the truth from that woman to-morrow——"

"Taking into consideration the amount of brains he's provided with, I don't wonder that English fellow would have believed that whole blackmailing stunt to be some sort of a practical joke," Dennis interrupted, intent upon his own train of thought. "That cake, now. Margot said that when it came the bare sight of it all but made Mrs. Jarvis faint. Yet what was there in the gift of it that should have warned her of what was coming? 'Twas the same as other big fancy cakes, wasn't it, except for that foreign word on it, that you say means 'Christmas'?—What's got you, Mac?"

For it was McCarty's turn to stare, with dropped jaw and eyes into which a sudden light had gleamed.

"By all the saints, you've struck it!" he ejaculated.

"You've hit the nail on the head, Denny! 'Twas not the cake at all but the one word on it that told Mrs. Jarvis the past wasn't buried as deep as she'd thought! Noel! It means Christmas, all right, but what else would it stand for, to her?"

"Ask me another!" invited Dennis. "If the black-mailing blackguard wanted to remind her of something by the one word, why did he go to all the trouble of fixing up the cake? Why didn't he write it to her, or maybe spell it out in those macaroni letters?"

"'Twas the art of him, Denny! The damned cleverness of him! To anyone else 'twould look just like a fine Christmas cake, the way it did to all of us until this minute, but to her it meant that someone had raked up what she was trying to forget. 'Twas the only way he could get that word to her without anyone else being the wiser. Terhune had him right; 'tis no ordinary strangling thug we're up against but a shrewd, crafty devil that planned every move ahead and knew just how to play on her fears. She must have been as helpless in his hands as a bird in a snare, poor thing!"

"He did not plan the last move far ahead, that's a safe bet," Dennis remarked. "If 'twas him found her there in the museum he acted quick enough then on the spur of the moment, without giving her time to scream once!"

"And 'tis because of that we'll get him, Denny," predicted McCarty. "There was never a clever crook yet that didn't over-reach himself sooner or later, and this is the one time he didn't look ahead; that is, if 'twas him. That's one thing I can't get through my head yet; why the black-mailer should have spoiled his own game by killing the source of the income. There's just one answer that would fit it, but you'd think me stark crazy if I was to spring it now."

"I'm not Inspector Druet," Dennis reminded him re-

proachfully. "I took your word for it last year, didn't I, when I let you dump me in the middle of an Illinois wheat field, looking for a girl that had lain in another one's grave for two weeks? If you're going to hold out on me now——"

"'Twas only a notion, and, 'twill keep till I get hold of that ex-stewardess and learn what was in those letters," McCarty demurred. "They must have been written to Leonidas Hoyos himself if that old wallet was his." But there's one thing sure, Denny; the cake was a reminder of that case that had meant trouble for her or hers, no less. 'Twas the Hoyos murder that she was paying to keep dark and the secret of it cost her her own life!"

CHAPTER XVIII

GREEKS MEET

THE middle-aged individual with sandy mustache and twinkling blue eyes, who registered the following morning as Timothy Mack at the Oceanside Cottage in Atlantic City, had little of the look about him of the tired business man seeking rest. His jovial converse with the austere landlady and the gusto with which he lighted the most expensive cigar from the showcase upon the counter led her to conclude, as she later confided with some misgivings to the clerk, that he was "out for a time."

Her announcement that she maintained no bar and the house was locked up promptly at twelve was received with smiling good-nature, and after a brief survey of the diminutive, cell-like room to which he had been assigned the newcomer settled himself in the lobby to finish his smoke and await developments.

Oceanside Cottage was one of the army of small boarding houses which, crowded shoulder to shoulder, flanked the less pretentious avenues leading from the beach. Its slightly weatherbeaten exterior would have been the better for a fresh coat of paint, but the lobby was brave in its expanse of bright red carpet and glistening oak furnishings.

The latest arrival experienced a panicky feeling that he had invaded a manless Eden as he surveyed the groups of females of indeterminate age and uncompromisingly prim demeanor who passed before him. The description Billings had given of Calvin Norwood's visitor dwindled to meager

and wholly unsatisfactory proportions as a means of identification. "Middle-aged, blousy, untidy gray hair, shabby black clothes, English but not a Londoner"; there was not an item of it which could not have been changed by suddenly acquired affluence except the age, the betraying accent and the hair, and the latter, as McCarty somewhat cynically reminded himself was by no means a safe bet.

Two of the guests, a lady with a transformation which obviously failed of its mission and a mournful spinster with a perpetual sniff, had seated themselves in close proximity and were evidently continuing a conversation started elsewhere, for the melancholy one remarked:

"Heavens knows, it ain't necessary to go around telling all your business, but I always say: if a person is so close-mouthed they won't let a word fall, there's a reason for it. There ain't an inquisitive bone in my body, but I talked to her for an hour last night and got nothing out of her beyond that she was English and had traveled a lot. I tried her on teaching and typewriting and every respectable thing I could think of, but my hints just rolled off her like water off a duck's back. Did you notice her hands?"

The transformation nodded emphatically.

"Housekeeper, I put her down," its wearer vouchsafed. "Housekeeper for some childish old man who'd died and left her money. She's got bold eyes and a wheedling manner for all her stand-offishness, and that's just the kind to get around an old fool. My poor husband——"

"Hush! There she comes." The other sniffed. "I saw that hat in a boardwalk store the other day for eighteen dollars. Sinful, I call it, for a woman her age——"

McCarty's teeth clamped upon his cigar and his eyes turned to the stairs. A tall, amply proportioned woman was descending, clad in a black, fur-trimmed cloak which revealed the lines of her trim, full figure and accentuated her height.

Her face was not uncomely, of overblown slightly florid type, and the snap in her large, black eyes belied the streaks of gray in the dark hair beneath the smartly quilled hat.

She moved to the desk with a certain air of brisk assurance, deposited her key, and went out the door while McCarty threw away his cigar and after a few casual inquiries of the clerk as to points of interest, discreetly followed.

The woman was half-way down the block ahead of him in the direction of the beach, walking with a full, swinging stride which held a suggestion of a sailor's easy, rolling gait, but when she reached the boardwalk she paused uncertainly and finally started north toward the Inlet.

Past the hotels and piers she made her way, past shops and booths and shooting galleries to where scattered cottages and an unbroken expanse of beach and surf lined the boardwalk. The sky grew sullen and overcast and a stiff north-easter, precursor of a coming storm, beat in her face but she breasted it erectly with unbent head as though she gloried in the turbulence of the unrestrained elements. Pedestrians were few and only an occasional rolling chair shared their solitude, while the screaming gulls wheeled closer inshore and a stray dog nosing in a heap of wreckage upon the sands lifted his head and howled dismally.

The woman turned at last and McCarty with a grunt of relief dropped down upon a bench until she should have passed him. He was frankly winded and mentally anathematized the insidiously increasing flesh which years of ease and inactivity had girt about his sturdy form. He studiously averted his gaze as the woman approached and only when her tall figure was all but merged in the driving mist beyond did he rise and again set forth upon the trail.

He hoped devoutly that she was returning to the warmth and conventional cheer of the boarding house, but when the first of the piers was reached she halted, her eyes fixed upon

the tumbling waves beneath and after a moment passed through the entrance gates and out upon the long jetty.

An exhibition building, closed now for the season, stood at the furthest end of the pier facing the infinite waste of the ocean, and behind this structure the woman vanished. McCarty lighted a fresh cigar and clinging tenaciously to the rail in the lee of a stucco pillar, waited for a decent interval, but she did not reappear, and finally he strolled around the corner of the building. His quarry was seated on a bench close to the rail, gazing seaward with an unwinking stare and seemingly oblivious of his presence.

He hesitated, coughed deferentially, then seating himself on the end of the bench farthest from her, pulled a newspaper from his pocket and proceeded to study her over its top.

All at once she turned and fixed him with a disconcertingly level stare.

"It won't do you a bit of good to follow me," she announced calmly. "I've no use for fresh old flirts that ought to know better."

McCarty gasped.

"I'm sorry, ma'am." Injured dignity sounded in every syllable. "I'm a stranger and wanted to come out on this pier, but I didn't know it was allowed till I saw you going through the gate. If my cigar annoys you, I'll go away."

He made as if to rise but his scandalized look was inimitable and the woman laughed frankly.

"Oh, I don't mind a whiff of tobacco! I thought you were one of those smart blighters that give me the hump down here, fancying every woman, will fall for a smirk and a line of jolly. Stay where you are, if you like. It's a little bit of all right out here, isn't it?"

"It's grand, ma'am. Barring a day now and then at Coney I'm not what you might call familiar with the sea."

McCarty's shocked expression had given place to a beaming smile of disarming friendliness. "This pier, now, might be the deck of a ship."

"Without the rolling and pitching." The woman squinted knowingly at the horizon. "We're in for a touch of heavy weather, I should say. You'll see something then, sir, that's well worth your trip."

"You're fond of the sea, ma'am. I'm city bred myself and sociable, like. There's a sort of lonesomeness about all this water to me." McCarty waved a comprehensive arm.

"I hate cities!" The woman shuddered and her eyes fell upon the newspaper which McCarty had purposely held so that the flaring head-lines might come within her range of vision. "You may be more lonely in them than at sea, and they're filled with dirt and poverty and dreadful happenings."

"There's bound to be both the good and the bad cropping out where a lot of people are crowded together," McCarty observed sententiously. "But if there's a criminal instinct in anybody it's as liable to make him act on sea as on land. You've heard no doubt, ma'am, of dreadful happenings on board all kinds of ships, from yachts to liners?"

"I—I suppose so." Her voice was lowered and her florid cheek had paled as she turned and stared once more steadily before her. "I don't hold with horrors myself."

"No more do I," McCarty conceded. "That is, not as a rule, but I've been reading about this murder that took place in New York a few days ago. You've seen the account of it, ma'am?"

"You mean the—the woman that was found strangled to death in some sort of museum?" she asked. "I haven't looked at to-day's paper. Did they find out who did it?"

"Not yet, ma'am. Would you be having a look at this?" He offered his newspaper, but just as she reached for it his

fingers relaxed ever so slightly, and the wind tore it from his loosened grasp and bore it over the rail. "Too bad! We'll get another, though, on the boardwalk. There's rare news to-day; they've found out that the poor lady was not murdered in her own home and the body carried across yards and put in the museum, as was said all along. She went there herself, unbeknownst to anyone, and 'twas there she was killed."

"In that place?" The woman shuddered again. "It was some sort of collection of crime relics belonging to a rich, batty old man, wasn't it? I got that far with it the other day before I chucked it. I don't mind a bit of spicy reading now and then, but Lor'! that made my flesh creep, and no mistake! What would a lady like her be doing in that chamber of horrors?"

"They do be saying she went there for something the old man had bought just lately to add to his collection," McCarty replied innocently. "Something to do with a crime she had knowledge of long ago."

"What!" The woman clutched at the back of the bench to steady herself as she turned and faced him once more, and he saw a dawning horror in her hard eyes. "Did to-day's paper say that?"

"It did," McCarty lied. "'Tis hinted she was afraid of the truth coming out and her name being connected with it."

"Did it mention what the object was that the lady was after?" His companion demanded in a tone which trembled despite her self-repression.

"Let me see!" McCarty rubbed his chin reflectively. "Yes. 'Twas a wallet; a man's black wallet with a couple of letters inside."

The woman drew in her breath with a sharp little hiss and there was a pause before she laughed shakily.

"Quite like a 'penny dreadful,' isn't it? Lady Genevieve stealing the papers! I wonder what it was all about?"

"The old man told the police, it seems, that the letters had to do with the murder of some foreign gentleman with an outlandish name on board of a yacht in the Hudson some years back. 'Twas that I had in mind when I spoke just now of crimes at sea."

"Did he say—the old man—how the letters came into his hands?" There was an odd, choking quality in the woman's tones.

"I think so, but I only just glanced over the account of it." McCarty appeared to ruminate. "I remember it said something about a woman having sold them to him; a woman who used to be employed on the yacht. I suppose the police will be hotfoot after her now."

"But why?" cried his companion. "They don't accuse her of the murder, do they? If she was working on the yacht the time the other affair happened she must have told all she knew at the inquest—I mean to say, if there was one."

"Not quite. She didn't say anything about the letters, and that's suppression of evidence; a serious matter in a case like that." McCarty watched the woman narrowly. "Then, too, she sold the letters, which lays her open to a charge of conversion of property and I don't know what else besides."

"You talk like a blooming solicitor!" the other jeered in an attempt at lightness.

"I've had to do with the law in my time," responded McCarty. "It stands to reason the woman must know something about this last crime, anyway, when another one was murdered for the letters she'd carried so long."

"I say, how do the bobbies know that the lady went there

for the letters? Were they found on the body? Why hasn't there been a word about them in the papers before now?"

"They've not been found. In fact, they've only just been missed. 'Twas known they were safe in the museum an hour before the murder and no one's been in since that would have touched them, so it's easy to dope out that whoever broke in and killed her, did it to get possession of the wallet and took it away with him."

The woman laughed scornfully.

"It's easy to dope out anything if you have enough imagination and nerve!" she remarked. "If that is all they have to go upon, they've a bloody lot of cheek, I say, to go smirching a lady's name by trying to connect it with a forgotten scandal just because the old duffer can't find his precious relic! They must be hard put to it for a scape-goat!"

Her voice had grown raucous and there was an ugly, sullen light in her eyes which hardened her expression immeasurably. McCarty took a long shot.

"But remember the letters themselves," he said slyly. "Though they're gone, their contents is known. They'd tell the whole story, and show the lady's connection with the case——"

"How would they?" the woman shrilled. "There's no one alive cares tuppence for the letters!. They both died that night——"

"Papers? New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington and Pittsburg morning pape-rs!"

A small, piping voice sounded close beside them and with a muttered imprecation McCarty turned. A diminutive newsboy, shivering and clutching his few remaining papers tightly beneath one arm, stood hopefully regarding them.

"Yes. Give me a morning paper, boy!" The woman exclaimed. "Any one will do, if it is the last edition. Here you are, and never mind the change!"

McCarty opened his lips to speak but it was too late. The boy was scurrying off with his unexpected largesse and the woman sat scanning her paper with an eagerness which gave place to blank astonishment merged in mounting wrath.

McCarty waited in silence until she crushed the paper in her hands and turned once more to him.

"Who are you?" She spoke quietly but her voice shook.

"My name is Timothy McCarty——"

"I thought so! I thought you were one of that crew sent to hound me!" She twisted the paper convulsively and flung it over the rail. "I ought to have known, in spite of your smooth-spoken way, when you began talking about——about happenings on yachts! There is not a word in the news concerning a—a black wallet, and I don't know what you mean——"

"You're Kate Stricker, aren't you?" McCarty demanded, with a sudden note of sternness in his voice.

"Oh! yes. I'm Kate, all right, as you could see by the register where I'm stopping. I didn't come down here to hide!" she declared in scorn. "I was stewardess on *The Mulette* when Mr. Hoyos—when the accident happened, and I gave my testimony full and free at the inquest. If I'd been wanted, the police could have laid a finger on me any time in the past ten years. I don't know anything about any wallet, or letters, and I never laid eyes on the old duffer that owns the museum, or the lady who was murdered there!"

"Slow with that!" McCarty cautioned. "Remember the butler laid eyes on you when you went to the Norwood

house to sell the letters, and he can back up Mr. Norwood's testimony."

"Pooh!" The woman snapped her fingers. "From what I read this past week, the old governor's so wild to be of importance in the case that he'd swear to anything, and show me a butler who can't be bought over! When it comes to that, I can prove where I was every minute of last week and my witnesses are as good as his! There was no other woman employed on *The Murette* in those days but me, and though I'd small liking for the master I wouldn't touch his dirty letters! If any were palmed off on that balmy old duffer it was a sell, and the woman claiming to be me, if there was one, was a blooming impostor! I've read about you, too, if you're the ex-Roundsman who was there when the body was found. You can go back to them who sent you down here, Mr. McCarty, and tell them that Kate Stricker is ready to face them, and any charge that suits their fancy!"

McCarty waited patiently until the tirade had ceased and then he asked quietly:

"How about the money you've come into lately? Where did it come from?"

"That's my affair!" she flared, then hastily as if realizing the weakness of defiance, she added: "I—I saved it."

"From your salary at the orphan asylum?"

"Let them prove it wasn't." She rose. "I'm not on the stand yet, and I'll answer no more of your questions! When the time comes I'll be ready, no fear!"

McCarty got slowly to his feet and remarked as if in afterthought:

"So you had no liking for the man Hoyos."

"I had not," the woman responded. "He's dead, but he was a beast if ever there was one. He got his just deserts,

I say, and the only pity of it was that the poor young thing died with him! I know nothing about this other murder, or the wallet or any letters, and if you have no warrant for me, I'll thank you to let me pass!"

McCarty shrugged and stepped back, but as she moved he made a final effort.

"You're mistaken in thinking anyone sent me. I'm not connected with the force any more and if you'll tell me the truth and what was in those letters, I can promise you the police won't bother you about selling them. If not, I'll have to go to Headquarters."

The woman smiled in triumph.

"So that's it! You don't know, eh, and you've come here on your own to pump me! I'm sorry, Mr. McCarty, but as I never heard of the letters until now, I can't tell you what's in them. Go to Headquarters and tell them what you please. I've said my last word."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECOND SHOT

MCCARTY paid a call upon the chief of police, met his amazed landlady's resentful reminder that she took no transients with the payment of a full week's board, and caught the early afternoon train for New York. During his brief return to Ocean-side Cottage he had caught no further glimpse of Kate Stricker, but concluded that she was planning a getaway no less precipitous than his own.

The local police would take care of that contingency, however, and as McCarty settled himself in the train a glow of satisfaction pervaded him, despite his defeat of the morning.

Albeit fruitless otherwise, his interview with the stewardess on the pier had in one illuminating flash revealed to him a possible means of breaking down the bars of her reticence. If, at their next meeting, he were in a position to convince her of a certain fact, in addition to a guaranty of her personal immunity, he felt assured that she could be prevailed upon to tell all that she knew.

He had already satisfied himself upon one point. Whatever the letters contained which she had guarded for so long and parted with only through dire necessity, she had had no share in the blackmailing scheme. Her astonishment at learning of the murdered woman's effort to obtain possession of the wallet and her disbelief that it was the cause of the tragedy were too real to be feigned. Granting that premise, the letters themselves could not have been

the instrument held over Mrs. Jarvis' head, in fear of which she had submitted to the extortionate demands made upon her. Some other form of exposure must have threatened in connection with her secret; some other evidence must still exist to provide a link between her and the event of ten years before.

The hours passed swiftly and his journey came to an end as he still pondered over the fresh aspect of the problem. The storm which threatened at Atlantic City had preceded him here, and he emerged from the station in a blinding swirl of snow, to engage a taxi and sit with grim, resentful eyes upon its swiftly mounting meter until his own door was reached.

There, huddled under the shelter of the cornice, he found a sodden, blue-nosed messenger boy.

"Is your name McCarty?" the latter mumbled stupidly.

"It is. You've something there for me? Come upstairs, lad, and warm yourself while I see is there an answer wanted."

The boy stumbled after him up the stairs and McCarty built up a roaring fire in the grate before he took from the numbed fingers the envelope which they held out to him.

The superscription was a mere hasty scrawl in an unknown but obviously feminine hand, and he broke the seal. Then, for a long minute he stood staring, while the words danced before his eyes and his stout heart missed a beat.

"Dear Mr. McCarty," he read again, scarcely crediting the evidence of his vision, "Captain Marchal is dead. Please come at once as soon as you receive this. Joan Norwood."

Dead! McCarty checked the flow of wildly futile suppositions which thronged his brain and summarily bundled

the messenger out into the storm once more. The street was almost deserted, but finding the taxi in which he had come fortuitously halted near the corner saloon, McCarty hailed forth its chauffeur and shamelessly bribed the latter to break all speed records to the Norwood house.

A trembling and awestruck Billings admitted him, who when he turned toward the library where he had heretofore been received, waved him back.

"Not there, sir! That's where he was found! The drawing-room, please, sir."

The butler's usually ruddy face was a pasty gray and there were dark, sinister spots upon his vest.

"What's that? Blood?" asked McCarty sharply.

Billings shuddered.

"Yes, sir. I helped lift him and I've had no time to change."

"Was it murder?"

"Don't ask me, sir! The pistol was by him—here's Mr. Norwood, now."

"McCarty, my dear fellow!" The elderly little man's voice shook and the hand he extended quivered also, as if with a palsy. "You have heard? I tried to get you twice on the wire, but no one answered. Poor Victor! Poor persecuted, overwrought lad!"

"What happened? I heard only that Captain Marchal was dead."

"He has killed himself! That sharp attack of fever must have weakened his defenses, sapped his last remaining ounce of strength with which to fight the acute melancholia that threatened ever since his sight was destroyed and which the man Terhune's unfounded suspicions have brought to a crisis. But come! You shall see for yourself."

He led the way to the library and McCarty followed, but on the threshold both paused. The room was bril-

liant, lighted and in the unaccustomed glare each significant detail leaped into prominence and photographed itself instantaneously upon McCarty's mind. That the habitually ordered ensemble of the room had been violently disarranged was evident at a first glance. The huge center table had been slewed around so that it cut off the corner where stood the secretary's desk, and the electrolier and book racks which had adorned it were thrown about the floor. A heavy leather chair, overturned, completed the barrier and the hearth rug was crumpled and awry. Upon the couch before it a quiet figure lay, with a white cloth covering the face, and after a minute Calvin Norwood advanced toward it and lifted the cloth.

"You see?" he murmured.

McCarty nodded without speaking, for despite the long apprenticeship on the force which had hardened him to similar scenes, he felt an unaccustomed lump rising in his throat. The pallid face with the tortured strain and need of self-repression gone was singularly boyish and serene, the vacant eyes softly closed and a faint elusive smile like the ghost of a happy thought hovered about the immobile lips. Upon the breast over the heart a small crimson stain appeared, flecked with grains of powder.

"My poor boy! If only we had not left him alone!" Norwood replaced the cloth with tender hands and McCarty saw the slow tears of age standing heavily in his faded eyes. "If only we had realized his condition and guarded him from himself!"

A little group of men who had been in earnest consultation in the embrasure of the farthest window turned, and with an exclamation one of their number stepped forward. "Mac! I sent Yost for you not five minutes ago! What do you think of this affair?"

It was plain that Inspector Druet meant to ignore their

interview of the previous day and McCarty promptly followed his example.

"Don't know, sir, till I hear the facts." He laid scant stress upon the final word. "I'm not holding by any more. Marchal's dead, but what's been going on here?"

"I haven't got a detailed statement yet, but as far as I can learn everyone was out of the house this afternoon. They came home and found him lying dead on the floor over there in the corner behind the table, with his own French army pistol in his hand, and the room upset as you see it now. I'm waiting for the Chief Medical Examiner, but there's no doubt that he killed himself. The powder marks about the wound alone show that, for death had been almost instantaneous, and no one could have got within ten feet of him the way he had pulled the furniture around."

"Had he?" McCarty asked.

"Don't you see it, man?" retorted the Inspector impatiently. "He was alone in the house and I made sure right off the bat that no one could have broken in."

"Poor Victor's mind became suddenly unhinged and he ran amuck. That is the only possible explanation," Norwood intervened. "He has brooded constantly over the murder and this morning I noticed the change in him; a state of nervous excitability—which gave me great concern. Oh, why was I not warned then? I did beg him to rest, but he seemed utterly unable to compose himself, and wandered about the house in an almost distraught manner most of the morning. He seemed to be more like himself after lunch and I left him here at his typewriter when I went out."

"Where is the typewriter now?" McCarty demanded. "It's gone from his desk."

"Here on the floor." Inspector Druet moved one end of the center table and made room for McCarty to squeeze through the aperture. "He must have sent it crashing off the desk, but it landed right side up as you see, although the ribbon is broken."

"How could he have done that?" speculated McCarty. "Twould take the sweep of a pile-driver to knock that heavy machine over."

"Oh, he probably staggered against the desk in his frenzy and tilted it so that the typewriter slid off; then the desk righted itself again. You see how all the papers he had been working on are scattered around."

McCarty eyed the litter and nodded slowly.

"And just where was the body found?"

"Here." The Inspector measured off a space upon the rug. "From what I have been able to gather, he was lying with his feet toward the table and his head almost touching the wall paneling. The body should not have been moved until my arrival, but it was placed upon the couch, by Miss Norwood's orders, I believe, even before I was notified."

There was stern reproof in the Inspector's tones and McCarty turned to Calvin Norwood.

"Who discovered the body?"

"My niece and her fiancé," the latter responded. "Poor Joan was inexpressibly shocked and I found her on the verge of collapse when I returned. Here is the pistol with which Victor killed himself. It was lying within reach of his fingers. He kept it in that drawer of his desk which you see open now. It was his own, you know; he brought it from France with him."

McCarty took the weapon which Norwood had picked up from the corner of the table and handed to him. It was a service pistol, of a caliber little larger than those with

which he was familiar, and after examining it he looked up to meet the Inspector's quizzical gaze bent upon him.

"How many shots were fired from it?" he asked.

Inspector Druet smiled.

"I wondered if you'd get it," he said. "Two shots were fired, but only one entered the body; the other—the first—must have gone wild. It is possible that he shot at some imaginary enemy and then turned the weapon on himself."

The arrival of the Chief Medical Examiner put an end for a time to further investigation in that quarter. Calvin Norwood stayed to hear his verdict, but McCarty stepped out into the hall.

Billings was nowhere to be seen, but a low, anxious feminine voice called his name softly from the drawing-room, and he entered to find Miss Norwood pacing back and forth, twisting a wisp of a handkerchief nervously between her fingers while Vivaseur, his face grave with sympathy, sat before the hearth poking the fire in an aimless, meditative fashion.

"You received my note, Mr. McCarty?"

"Yes, ma'am," he responded. "That's what brought me here. I'd been out of town but I found your messenger waiting for me when I got back. 'Tis a very sad business, Miss Norwood."

"It is terrible!" she cried. "Poor, poor Captain Marchal!"

"They do be saying that 'twas you and Mr. Vivaseur that found him?" McCarty suggested.

"Yes." She wrung her hands convulsively. "Oh, I shall never forget it! Mr. Vivaseur and I came in about half-past five. We had to ring and ring, for I haven't any latch-key; I lost mine while I was away visiting during this last month and when I returned I was too horrified and grieved at Mrs. Jarvis' awful death to think of anything else, so I forgot to have another made. Finally Billings

came and admitted us, but he had only just returned to the house himself and hadn't had time to switch on the lights or build up the fires. Eric—Mr. Vivaseur—waited here in the drawing-room while I ran upstairs to remove my out-door things, and Billings brought him a brandy and soda.

"We sat here and chatted for a few minutes and then all at once I remembered Captain Marchal and sent Billings to see if he were lying down, for I feared that he might be ill again. Billings said that he was not in his room, and I crossed the hall to the library in search of him. It was still dark in there, but I pressed the electric switch in the wall and the first thing I saw when the lights sprang up was the big table pushed out of place and the chair overturned.

"I must have cried out, I think, for Mr. Vivaseur came, and Billings, and then—then we saw him lying there!"

She paused and covered her face with her hands and Vivaseur rose, coming forward solicitously.

"Don't, dear! You can't help the poor chap now, you know, and you will really make yourself ill. I suppose they have told you how we found the body?" He turned to McCarty. "His fingers were almost touching the pistol as if it had just fallen from his hand. I saw at a glance that it was all over, of course, but Miss Norwood could not believe it and begged us to do something for him. Billings and I got him up on the couch between us, which it appears we should not have done, for your Inspector johnny was in a hat about it when he came. I fancy it is another of your official regulations, but it seemed rather too awful to leave the poor chap lying there like that. Miss Norwood wanted to summon a physician but I managed to convince her that it would be useless; then her next thought was for you, and we despatched the messenger."

"Who called up Headquarters?" asked McCarty.

"Billings. Excellent man, that. Keeps his head about him." Vivaseur shrugged. "I don't mind admitting that the thing knocked me a bit, at first. I've seen a lot of the chaps go west in the first two years of the fighting, but this was a different matter. However, Billings took charge, and then Mr. Norwood himself returned."

"Was the cook out, too, this afternoon, and the housemaid?" McCarty rubbed his chin. "How was it, miss, that Captain Marchal came to be left all alone in the house?"

"Cook has gone, bag and baggage; she left this morning," Miss Norwood explained. "It just happens that my own personal maid is away on a visit to her mother in the country. The housemaid prepared lunch and after she and Billings had cleared it away, I permitted her to go out for the afternoon, supposing that Billings would be here, but my uncle had already sent him on an errand. I went out myself, first to an intelligence office to secure another cook and then to visit old Mrs. Lyle Fremont, who is ill and had sent for me. Mr. Vivaseur called at her house and brought me home."

"Mrs. Lyle Fremont," McCarty repeated. "Wasn't it with her that Mrs. Jarvis was to have dined the night she was killed?"

Joan Norwood nodded.

"Yes. She won't have a telephone, you know, and she never knew why Mrs. Jarvis failed to keep her engagement until she read of the murder in the papers next day."

"Mr. Norwood himself was out all the afternoon?" McCarty chose his words with evident care.

"He was downtown with Oliver Jarvis, at his attorney's, helping him to arrange his affairs and make out a

statement of his operations with his wife's money for Inspector Druet," Miss Norwood replied. "He went home with Oliver afterward and stayed until six o'clock."

"And did he come back by way of the little door in the fence?"

"No!" she shuddered. "That door is bolted and barred forever!"

"Oh, I say!" Vivaseur expostulated. "You don't mean to insinuate, my dear fellow——"

"I'm insinuating nothing, sir," McCarty said hastily. "I'm just wanting to know where everybody was. Mr. Norwood says that Captain Marchal acted queer this morning. Did you notice it, miss?"

"He was more nervous and excited, and that strained, listening attitude of his, of which we told you yesterday, seemed more accentuated, but somehow I did not dream that it meant anything more serious than perhaps a return of the fever. If only we had realized his mental condition we could have taken steps to prevent this terrible thing! I, for one, shall never forgive myself!"

Vivaseur laid a hand upon her arm and gently forced her into a chair as she broke down and sobbed hysterically, and at that moment Inspector Druet appeared in the doorway.

"The Medical Examiner has gone," he announced. "It is a clear case of suicide and there is nothing more for us to do about it."

McCarty advanced to him and asked in a lowered tone:

"Has the body been removed yet?"

"No, they're waiting for the undertaker now."

"Then, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to go back in there and look around a bit," McCarty remarked. "I wonder what he'd started to work on this afternoon when *the fit* took him?"

"Go as far as you like!" The Inspector stepped aside to allow him to pass, and then followed him to the library door. "Say, Mac, that girl, Etta Barney, came down to see me this morning, and later on Oliver Jarvis showed up. Their stories are straight enough, too, as far as I've have been able to discover, and they both said that you sent them. It looks as though my theory of the murder was away off and I've got to start all over again."

It was as near an apology as Inspector Druet had ever been called upon to make, and McCarty flushed darkly.

"Oh, well, sir, it's like many another case, that seems a puzzle you'd never get the answer to, and then all of a sudden you'll light on one little clue that'll make the whole thing as plain as day."

"I can't quite see that idea of yours yet, Mac, though there may be something in it, at that. Terhune will be in fine feather now."

"Will he so?" McCarty paused, and the Inspector pointed significantly to the still figure upon the couch.

"Of course. This suicide will be an admission of guilt in his estimation and his theory will be vindicated. Well, I'm going to get a statement from these people as to where they all were this afternoon, to file in my record, and then I'll call it a day. So long, Mac."

"Good-night, sir." He turned as if to go to the dismantled desk in the corner, but as soon as the Inspector's footsteps had died away down the hall, he walked swiftly to the couch and bent over the body. He did not remove the cloth from the face, but devoted his attention to the blood-stained and powder-flecked clothing about the wound and when he straightened after a prolonged scrutiny, it was with a low whistle of surprise.

For several minutes he stood lost in profound meditation, then slowly and cautiously he began a circuit of the

room. A glint of steel half-buried in the deep pile of the rug under the center table caught his eye and stooping, he picked up a huge pair of long-bladed, bronze-handled library shears. He examined them minutely and then with a guilty glance toward the door he wrapped his handkerchief about the points and thrust the shears hastily into his hip pocket.

To any possible observer his behavior during the next ten minutes would have been highly mystifying. He dropped lumberingly down upon his knees and searched every inch of the rug about the spot where the shears had fallen, then raised himself until his eyes were on a level with the table top and scanned its polished surface aslant beneath the light. What he discerned there evidently gratified him, for he grunted with satisfaction as he pulled an envelope from his pocket and holding its gaping orifice beneath the table edge, carefully ran his finger over the surface. Creasing the envelope together at the top, he returned it to his pocket and rising, continued his search.

"You here still, Mac?" Inspector Druet paused in the doorway some twenty minutes later, to find McCarty beside the opened drawer of the desk, staring with knitted brows at the paper which he held in his hand.

"Yes, sir. Will you have a look at this?"

The object of his scrutiny was apparently a sheet of blank typewriter paper with a signature scrawled half-way down the page and the Inspector regarded it with raised eyebrows. The signature, in a straggling, uncertain hand, was that of Victor Marchal.

"What do you make of it, sir?"

"Nothing." The Inspector yawned. "He was probably practicing how to write his name over again since he became blind and threw the paper back into the drawer. There's *nothing* to that, Mac."

"All right. But if you don't mind, I'll be taking it along, just to amuse myself with."

McCarty folded the paper and put it in the pocket where the envelope reposed, while the Inspector stared.

"Look here, Mac, what's the idea? You're holding out something!"

"Not facts, sir, only theories," McCarty grinned. "If it's facts you are looking for, there's two shots gone from the pistol and only one entered the body. Find out where the second one went to, and you'll be a busy man, the day!"

To Dennis Riordan where he sat yawning over an evening paper from which the baseball news had been patriotically but lamentably absent, there came a brisk and buoyant McCarty, with the light of purpose in his eyes. Dennis knew that look of old, and he flung aside the paper.

"So you're back!" he exclaimed. "And what is it now?"

"How are your eyes?" McCarty demanded without preamble.

"My eyes? What the——" he paused discreetly. "What's eating you, Mac? My eyes are all right."

"They're not!" announced McCarty flatly. "The smoke has got to them again and they're feeling mighty bad this minute. And to-morrow morning they'll be that sore that you'll be getting a matter of a week or ten days off to have them treated."

"I get you!" The sore eyes gleamed with swift comprehension. "Where are we off to?"

"New Orleans," responded McCarty, "to-morrow night on the eight o'clock train."

CHAPTER XX

FROM OUT THE PAST

ON a bright, balmy afternoon in late November the Planters' Bank of New Orleans was about to close its doors for the day when two men, obviously strangers, entered and approached the paying teller's window. One was tall and lantern jawed and moved with the lithe ease which told of perfect muscular training; the other heavy set but not bulky, with a stubby, reddish mustache on the long upper lip and keen smiling blue eyes.

"You've a director at this bank named Justin Messenger. I'd like to know where I can find him, please," announced the heavier of the two strangers.

The languid teller stared.

"Mr. Messenger never comes to the bank and rarely to a meeting," he replied coldly. "Is there anything we can do for you?"

"No, it's him I've got to see. Where did you say he lived?"

"I didn't say!" the teller snapped. "Mr. Messenger is very feeble and does not permit himself to be annoyed. What is the nature of your business with him?"

"That's his look-out!" The blue eyes narrowed and glinted gray. "We've been sent from New York to see him and if you want to make a secret of his whereabouts, I suppose there's a directory or two in this town! Come along, Denny!"

"Oh, from New York?" The teller's manner underwent

a change. "Mr. Messenger lives out on St. Charles Avenue; I'll write the address for you. The first vice-president is here, if you would care to see him instead."

The stranger declined, and receiving the proffered slip of paper, he departed, followed by his companion.

"Look here, Mac, you've not told me a word of what we're after!" the latter complained. "Who is this Justin Messenger, and what for are we trailing a feeble old man that'll likely have us thrown out for intruding on him?"

"He was a crony of Pierre Chartrand, and Chartrand was the guardian of Evelyn Beaudet as was, Oliver Jarvis' wife," McCarty responded. "Is it beginning to get through your thick head? Chartrand was the only one belonging to her and he's dead, but his most intimate friend is our next best bet."

"Thick I may be," Dennis conceded in some resentment, "but not being a mind-reader, it's not clear to me why a pal of the old man would know a secret that was kept from the girl's own husband. Have it your own way, but when we pick ourselves up after being chucked out, it'll be me that heads the next expedition, and that to a place where you can get one of the fizzes that put this burg on the map. My throat is like a dry-dock after that train."

"If we do get the gate," McCarty promised, "I'll stand treat."

The business section of the city once passed, St. Charles Avenue revealed itself as a thoroughfare of stately homes, and before one of the most imposing of these they alighted and then paused, scanning the house with speculative eyes.

"Look at the shades all down," Dennis commented. "I would be just your luck, Mac, if he'd died on you! From what that Willie-boy at the bank said——"

"Come on!" McCarty interrupted firmly. "Now remember we're sent here by Mr. Jarvis, and don't act as if you'd come to lift the silver!"

The aged negro butler who replied to their ring bobbed his woolly white head obsequiously as he took the note which McCarty produced, but seemed dubious as to his master's reception of them. However, he ushered them into a huge, dim drawing-room, where massively carved furniture was arranged stiffly against the wall and the pendants of the antiquated crystal chandelier tinkled to the vibration of the ex-Roundsman's heavy tread.

Dennis seated himself gingerly in the nearest chair and looked about him with professional interest.

"'Twould make a grand fire-trap!" he remarked. "With the floors all oily and that gallery around the hall out there to act as a flue, if you'd give it two seconds' start and a lick of wind, 'twould go up like tinder."

"Is it a fire we're here for, or information?" demanded McCarty sarcastically. "Whist, now, somebody's coming."

Slow, shuffling steps sounded upon the stairs, accompanied by the stumping of a heavy cane, and a thin, querulous voice exclaimed:

"Easy, Robert, easy! Ouch!—No, don't drag! There!"

The steps drew nearer and a gaunt, bowed old figure, crowned by a shock of snowy hair, appeared in the doorway leaning upon the old butler's arm.

He peered with curiously bright, searching eyes at his visitors as they rose, but did not speak until the servant had deposited him carefully in a chair and withdrawn.

"Mr. McCarty?" He looked from one to the other of them, and the ex-Roundsman bowed. "In this note which you have brought to me from Mr. Oliver Jarvis, of New York, he requests me to give you any information at my disposal. I presume he means concerning his wife, of

whose tragic death we have all heard here, but I am at a loss to understand why he should have sent you to me."

"Well, sir, he thought you, being Mr. Chartrand's friend, would likely know more than anyone else about Mrs. Jarvis," McCarty explained. "This is my assistant, Mr. Riordan. You've heard, of course, that Mrs. Jarvis was murdered; strangled to death in a private museum belonging to an old friend of her husband?"

Mr. Messenger nodded.

"A frightful affair! She was a lovely child, a charming young girl; I watched her grow to womanhood under my old friend's care." He checked himself suddenly, and added: "Have they found the assassin?"

"Not yet, sir, but the police are working on it and Mr. Jarvis has hired a celebrated private detective, the greatest in the country, to investigate the crime for him. We're here on a different matter entirely." McCarty paused. "Could you tell me, sir, what you know of Mrs. Jarvis' family?"

"She had none," Mr. Messenger responded, his bright old eyes fixed shrewdly on the questioner's face. "Her parents both died before she was six and in her father's will Pierre Chartrand was named her sole guardian and the executor of the estate. But why have you come to me? What sort of information does Mr. Jarvis seek; and why? He knew all that I can tell you of the Beudet family at the time of the marriage."

"Well, sir, in going over his wife's old letters and private papers, he came upon something which made him anxious for further information," McCarty remarked truthfully enough. "Had neither of her parents any relatives living at all?"

"None. Like herself, her mother was an orphan from childhood, and, her father, Felix Beudet, lost his parents

in a railroad disaster a few months after his marriage, just before Evelyn was born." The querulous voice reiterated. "But Mr. Jarvis knew this!"

"Mr. Chartrand was a bachelor, wasn't he?" McCarty persisted. "Can you tell me who the young lady's friends were as she grew up?"

The old gentleman crossed his hands on the top of his gold-headed cane and straightened himself in his chair.

"She was a very quiet, studious girl and cared little for society. After she left the Convent of the Blessed Name, where she was educated, she wished to join the order, but Mr. Chartrand opposed that, and she submitted to his wishes, although she took very little part in the social life about her, shutting herself up with her books and flowers and music. When my niece Loretta was married to Peyton Sawtelle, she would not even attend the wedding, although they had been inseparable at the convent."

"She's been married to Mr. Jarvis for five years," McCarty observed. "How long before that did she leave the convent?"

"Let me see. Bless me! It is ten years now; no, eleven next spring. She had always been a frail, delicate child and broke down from over study. I remember that she was ill for a long time." He moved impatiently in his chair. "But what is there in all this that can interest Mr. Jarvis now? What was the nature of the letter or document which he found?"

"That's not for me to say, sir," McCarty replied respectfully but firmly. "You'll hear all about it from Mr. Jarvis as soon as he can pull himself together, I've no doubt. I was just sent here to find out what I could of Mrs. Jarvis prior to her marriage. Did she stay shut

away like that from everybody all the four or five years before she met Mr. Jarvis?"

The old man hesitated, still regarding his visitor fixedly. At last he spoke, but slowly, as if choosing each word with care.

"She was not shut away. She merely preferred her quiet home and devoted herself to her guardian. After a year or two she began going about more, and frequently visited my niece at her home on Lake Pontchartrain. Indeed, it was at South Point that she met Mr. Jarvis. But as I told you, I have absolutely no information such as it appears he desires. Except for the unusual and most unfortunate circumstances I should not have discussed the lady at all with you. I know nothing concerning her with which her husband is not already fully acquainted; her life was simple in the extreme, and if he will let me know personally the nature of this document which he has found I will be glad to satisfy him upon it."

"I'll tell him, Mr. Messenger." McCarty rose and signaled to the absorbed Dennis with a glance. "Thank you for seeing me, sir. I'm sorry to have bothered you, but Mr. Jarvis could think of no one else who had known his wife so long and so well. You'll hear from him soon, no doubt. Good-day, sir."

"Phew!" whistled Dennis when the house door had closed behind them with a dignified thud. "The drinks are on you, all right, for even though we didn't get thrown out by the scruff of the neck, we was told to make ourselves scarce if ever looks could do it!"

McCarty's lips moved, but no words came and he walked as if in a trance, staring straight ahead of him with eyes that were round with wonder.

"All right! Keep mum if you want to!" Dennis re-

marked sourly. "It's little you got from the old one that'd make conversation. Whatever that murdered dago was to her or her family you'll get no word of it from the likes of him."

"He told us more than a word, if you'd been listening for it." McCarty found his voice at last. "According to young Jarvis, his wife was twenty-seven. That would make her sixteen or seventeen when she left the convent. Did you get when that was, Denny? Eleven years ago next spring!"

"And what then?" asked Dennis vacantly.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing at all except that 'twas eleven years ago come spring that our friend Hoyos got his, that's all!"

"Mac! And she was sick for a long time afterwards! Over study, the old fellow called it!" Dennis' mind had started to work. "She wanted to take the veil and then when her guardian wouldn't let her do that, she shut herself away from everyone! Sixteen or seventeen is no babe in arms; I wonder if that Hoyos was ever in New Orleans? He seems to have had a taking way with women, but the back of my hand to him for a thorough-going blackguard dead or alive!"

"Don't go getting yourself worked up about it till we know where we're at," McCarty counseled. "We've nothing yet to bank on, remember. If Messenger knew anything he'd not tell it, and we've got to have the straight dope on this."

"Where'll you get it?" Dennis demanded. "Chartrand's dead and if there was anything that he didn't tell young Jarvis when he married her, he'd not have breathed it now."

"Who is it, do you think, Denny, that young girls tell *their secrets to*?"

"How should I know? I've steered clear of them, young or old!" Dennis asserted warmly. "But I do remember home in the old days whenever Molly had a girl friend staying with her they'd be forever whispering and buzzing——"

"You've said it! Old Messenger said his niece was Evelyn Beaudet's best friend, if you recollect; I'm thinking we'll pay a little call to-morrow on Mrs. Peyton Sawtelle, of South Point."

Accordingly, the following afternoon after a brief journey, by rail, they reached their destination, and discreet inquiries on McCarty's part elicited the fact that the Sawtelles lived some three miles out on the road which bordered the lake. Further inquiries accompanied by a display of Northern prodigality placed at his disposal a small, battered car with a ragged negro driver and as they alternately plunged and crawled along the palm-fringed road Dennis observed:

"And this is November! Will you look at them lawns, as green as the sod in the Old Country? She'd have wanted to come back to it all fast enough in the long, cold winters up North unless there had been some memory she was trying to put behind her."

McCarty nudged him savagely and there was silence thereafter until they turned in between two tall gateposts and up a broad driveway to a venerable Colonial house whose massive white pillars gleamed like shafts of marble among the trees.

A dusky-hued housemaid admitted them with some suspicion and ushered them into a dainty, chintz-hung sitting-room, where presently there came to them a tall, slender, young woman with gold-bronze hair and soft, brown eyes which gazed at them in gentle inquiry.

"I am Mrs. Sawtelle. You wish to see me?"

"Yes, ma'am. My name's McCarty and this is Dennis

Riordan. We've come from New York to have a little talk with you if you'll be so good."

"New York!" she faltered, and her eyes darkened with apprehension. "Oh, I—I remember reading about you in the dispatches! You were both there when——"

"When the body of Mrs. Jarvis was discovered?" McCarty supplemented quietly as she hesitated. "We were, ma'am, and it's because of that we're here now."

"Have they found out who did it?" Her voice was a mere whisper, and she clasped her hands convulsively.

"No, ma'am. That is, they've pretty well decided who the guilty party is, but they've not laid hands on him yet." McCarty ignored Dennis' stare and went on earnestly. "Since Mrs. Jarvis' death some papers have come to light among her things which show there was something in her life before ever she'd met and married her husband that she never told, something that she'd have gone to any lengths to keep secret."

Mrs. Sawtelle dropped limply into a chair.

"This—this is not possible!" she stammered. "I knew her well and I cannot believe it! But how did you hear of me? Why have you come?"

"To learn the truth, ma'am. You and she were girls together at the Convent of the Blessed Name. You know why she left so suddenly, and why she was sick for so long and then shut herself up like a nun and wouldn't even go to your wedding, though you were closer to her than a sister——"

"Oh, stop! Stop!" She put her hands over her ears as though to shut out the sound of his voice. "I do not know what you are talking about! We were friends, yes, but it was just a girlhood companionship. She left the convent because of illness and was a semi-invalid for a long time. That is why she did not appear at my wedding and why——"

She had spoken eagerly, quickly, but beneath McCarty's calm, incredulous gaze she wavered and her voice died away in her throat.

"No, ma'am." His tone was deprecatingly respectful, but there was a note of finality in it. "You'll excuse me, but we know better than that. We know you were in her confidence and only you can tell us what happened that spring of nineteen-seven, and who the man was——"

"You are mistaken!" She spoke with studied hauteur but her lips were trembling. "I have no knowledge of any secret in Mrs. Jarvis' girlhood such as you intimate. Who sent you to me?"

"Mr. Jarvis himself. The papers that he found mentioned your name," McCarty fabricated boldly. "He asked us to come to you quietly, rather than do anything that would bring you into notoriety, ma'am."

"What are these papers?"

"Well," McCarty hesitated and then plunged, "there's a bit of an old diary——"

"A diary!" Mrs. Sawtelle clutched the arms of her chair. "I thought it was destroyed!"

McCarty concealed a start of triumph.

"Only partly, ma'am. There's enough of it left to tell Mr. Jarvis that his wife had lived a lie with him these five years; that she'd hid from him something he'd a right to know. Mrs. Sawtelle, who was the other man and what was he to her?"

She rose to her feet slowly and the brown eyes flashed.

"If I knew, do you think that I would betray her confidence?" she said. "If there were any secret which she did not tell her husband do you think I would speak now? She is dead and whatever she may have had locked in her heart must die with her."

"Not if it helps her murderer to go free." McCarty's tone was suddenly stern.

"Her—murderer!" Mrs. Sawtelle gasped. "You don't mean—it cannot be! She told me he was dead!"

An irrepressible gurgle emanated from Dennis' throat, but McCarty remained seemingly unmoved.

"Dead he may be, but there's another knew her story. Another who has blackmailed her out of thousands in the past year and who finally killed her——"

"Oh, God!" the young woman breathed. "What shall I do?"

"Tell us the truth, ma'am, and help us to find him," McCarty urged. "You can do your friend no good now by keeping still and if she could know she would want you to speak. 'Twill be on your soul if her murderer escapes and as for her husband, half the truth is worse for him than the whole of it."

Mrs. Sawtelle paced slowly to the window, where she stood for long gazing out over the rolling lawns to the blue waters of Lake Pontchartrain, while McCarty and Dennis waited in silence. At length she turned and her face, though pale, was composed and resolute.

"You are right. If she came to her death because of the secret which she has guarded, then I must break my promise to her. Mr. Jarvis was not her first husband. She ran away, eloped over the convent wall with a fascinating stranger, after a month of as tempestuous and romantic a wooing as ever a girl had. This was in the autumn of nineteen-six when she was only sixteen.

"The convent is situated on the bank of the Mississippi about fifty miles above New Orleans, and a month before, a beautiful yacht had dropped anchor within sight of our school windows. Sometimes a small boat came ashore and we caught glimpses of a tall, handsome, dark man in

white flannels. We made up all sorts of silly, sentimental stories about him and the yacht, which seemed to us like a floating fairyland.

"One afternoon in recreation hour I happened to be in a far corner of the garden when I heard someone laughing softly above me and looked up. Evelyn was sitting on the top of the wall and I heard a man's voice on the other side. That night in bed she told me it was the stranger from the yacht; that he was a Frenchman named Leon Hoguet and that he had the most wonderful eyes she had ever seen.

"It was the beginning and before I knew it she was slipping out every night to meet him, but she never crossed the wall until the night she went away with him for good. I could have stopped it by going to the Mother Superior, but it did not enter my head to betray her, although I blamed myself a million times in the years that followed. I was a year older than she but the romance of it thrilled me and we had both been kept like children, ignorant of the world.

"I shall never forget the night when she whispered to me that he had asked her to marry him. I was frightened and begged her not to run away but she would not listen, and the next night I stole out with her to the wall, kissed her and handed up her little bundle of clothing and heard her drop from the top down into his arms. The next morning the yacht was gone from the river.

"Of course there was a frightful time when she was missed, but I would not admit that I knew anything and her guardian and the Mother Superior both hushed it up for fear of scandal. I heard nothing from her for three long months. Then there came a pitiful little note. She was at home with her guardian in New Orleans; home and heart-broken.

"When I went home for the Easter holidays she was gone again and her guardian told me only that she was visiting

up the river. He never knew that I had been in her confidence but he had aged ten years in a few months. When the summer vacation came Evelyn had returned but she was desperately ill and for a long time her life was despaired of. She grew slowly better, however, and one day she told me the whole dreadful story.

"Leonidas Hoguet had taken her up the river to an obscure landing where they were married by an itinerant preacher, and at first she had been wildly happy but it only lasted for a very few weeks. He tired of her soon and used to leave her alone on the yacht for days together while he drank and dissipated in river towns. At last he deserted her in a hotel in Memphis and she made her way home.

"Her guardian forgave her and kept her secret, but he searched the country for Leonidas Hoguet. He never found him and when spring came, poor Evelyn forgot her pride and everything else, and ran away a second time, to go to him. How she found him I never knew, for she would tell me little about that time. She could never bring herself to speak of it except to say that he was dead. She had managed to reach him and had been with him when he died.

"I think you know the rest; how she shut herself away from everyone for more than three years. She could not bear to come to my wedding and I quite understood but later I persuaded her to put the past behind her and take up her life again. I had her with me a great deal and it was here that she met Oliver Jarvis, who knew my husband at college.

"He fell in love with her at first sight and I was so happy when I saw that she, too, had begun to care. She wanted to tell him the truth, but her guardian forbade it and she married him without speaking. He took her away and I have never seen her since. At first her letters came regularly, each one telling of her great happiness, but after a time they

gradually ceased and with the death of her guardian I realized that she wanted to put me and all her life down here out of her thoughts, like a chapter that is closed."

Mrs. Sawtelle drew a deep sigh and brushed her hand across her eyes.

"There, Mr. McCarty, I have told you everything! If Leonidas Hoguet is dead—and Evelyn would never have married Oliver unless it were true—who could have known her secret? Who could have killed her, and why?"

"I can't tell you that now, ma'am." McCarty's face was very grave but his eyes gleamed with a steely light. "There's a lot of work to be done on the case still and we're dealing with no ordinary criminal. We've got to go slow and take him unawares, but if he's alive a week from to-day I'm thinking he'll be under lock and key and no power on earth can save him from the chair!"

As he and Dennis took their departure, McCarty halted with his foot upon the running board of the ramshackle vehicle.

"Wait here a minute, Denny. I've just thought of something."

He turned and bounded up the porch steps to where Mrs. Sawtelle stood in the doorway, and there ensued a brief, hurried interchange of words. To Dennis it appeared that McCarty was eagerly questioning, the lady replying in evident surprise but affirmatively for her interrogator nodded emphatically and a broad smile lifted his stubby, sandy mustache as he bade her a second farewell.

He was still smiling as they jerked forward and lunged out upon the driveway to the gates.

"What was it hit you at the last minute?" Dennis demanded curiously. "You were a bold lad with your brag that the murderer would be under lock and key in a week!"

The smile vocalized in a chortle, and McCarty responded:
"Twas no empty brag! The thing that hit me at the last minute is the last proof I needed to put him there; the last little link between that blackmailing devil and the death house! We've got him now, Denny; got him at last!"

CHAPTER XXI

SIGNED, "VICTOR MARCHAL"

CALVIN NORWOOD was seated in solitude before the hearth in his library on Saturday night, trying to shut his ears to the occasional murmur of voices from the drawing-room where Joan and her lover were making plans for the future. He was trying hard not to listen too for another familiar sound; the light, halting step of the blind secretary.

No light save the glow of the fire lifted the shadows of the room and in a far corner the silent, shrouded typewriter loomed, a tangible reminder of the brave spirit which had sought to carry on through the darkness and fallen only when reason failed.

So deep was Norwood in his mournful reverie that he was oblivious to the ringing of the front door-bell and glanced up only when Billings appeared on the threshold.

"Mr. McCarty, sir."

"My dear fellow!" Norwood sprang up and extended his hand. "Where have you been for the past week and more? I've tried twice to see you."

"Have you, sir?" McCarty shook hands and dropped a trifle wearily into the chair his host indicated. "I've been out of town—only got back a couple of hours ago—and I've not had a decent night's sleep but one since I left. I thought I'd look in on you and hear the news."

"There is none." Norwood seated himself once more and sighed gloomily. "Since poor Victor's death I seem to be losing my grip on things. I cannot help a feeling of hope-

lessness about the investigation of Mrs. Jarvis' murder, and it is my belief that it will never be solved."

He spoke with a shade too much eagerness, and McCarty asked:

"Has Inspector Druet been around, sir?"

"Yes. I've stood by and watched the department make blunder after blunder for twenty years, but your Inspector has surpassed any of the others for sheer idiocy in this case; first by trying to place the guilt on Oliver, and now by nosing about after that Hoyos wallet of which I told you. I suspect you must have mentioned it to him, but his efforts to connect it with the murder are preposterous."

"Yes, sir," agreed McCarty equably. "Have you found it yet?"

Norwood stirred impatiently in his chair.

"No. I haven't looked!" he snapped. "It's there somewhere, of course. I tell you, these tragedies following one upon another have made me shudder at the very mention of crime! I shall never interest myself in such work again and I feel like making a bonfire of my whole collection in the yard!"

McCarty, remembering Joan's description of her uncle's frenzied, night-long search of the museum after discovering the disappearance of the wallet, smiled to himself at the tirade.

"What is Mr. Terhune doing, I wonder?" he queried.

"Terhune! Don't speak to me of him!" snorted the other indignantly. "He has rested his case completely on poor Victor's suicide, smirching the name of a dead man to hide his own incompetence, and more than all, he has managed to half convince Oliver of the truth of his damnable theory! Once let a man believe that another was secretly in love with his wife and he will be ready to believe anything else of him! Victor felt only a chivalrous and grateful

admiration for Evelyn, that I know. In spite of Terhune's sensational successes in the past, it is my opinion that the man is a bluff, pure and simple. The case has baffled him, just as it will everybody in the end, and he has taken the easy way out by thrusting the blame upon a man who is no longer here to defend himself. If Victor were only alive I would never cease my efforts to learn the truth, for that is the only way his name can be cleared. But I am an old man and I recognize the inevitability of defeat, as Inspector Druet will in time. Mark my words, McCarty, the mystery of Evelyn Jarvis' murder will never be solved."

"Perhaps not, sir. There's many another that hasn't been, like the Hoyos case." He rose. "Well, I'll be getting on back to my rooms. It's strange not to see Captain Marchal here, and his typewriter still there in the corner and all!"

"Yes!" Norwood groaned. "I find myself constantly listening for his step, and the click of the machine. I'm going to get rid of it at once; I cannot bear to have it about!"

McCarty hesitated.

"I wonder would you lend it to me, sir, for a few days?" he suggested at length. "I've a lot of letters to send out and I'm not handy with a pen. I'll take good care of it and bring it back safe."

"Of course you may take it. Keep it, if you will; I never want to see it again!"

"No, thank you, sir. It's just the loan of it I want, and if it's all the same to you I'll get a taxi and take it right along with me now."

"By all means." Norwood, too, had risen and now he pressed the bell. "Billings will send for one for you. I don't know what condition the typewriter is in after its fall. However, if you will telephone on Monday to the

office of the company who manufactured it they will send a man up to fix it for you."

"That'll be all right. I'll manage," McCarty assured him. "Good-night, Mr. Norwood, and thanks for the loan of it."

Travel-worn as he was, the next day found McCarty once more upon a train speeding southward, but this departure was of a comparatively brief duration. He emerged again from the Pennsylvania station at nightfall and this time he was not alone. A tall woman of majestic figure accompanied him, clad in a black, fur-trimmed cloak and smartly quilled hat and the two appeared to be on excellent terms with each other.

McCarty escorted her to an address far uptown, then returned to his rooms and uncovered the typewriter which stood upon the place of honor on his desk. Next, he inserted a sheet of paper and tested the keys to his satisfaction.

Thereupon he opened a lower drawer in his desk and after some fumbling produced a package which he regarded with an expression of mingled disparagement and respect. Unwrapped, it disclosed a small but powerful microscope.

Through the long hours of the night, while the coals died upon the hearth and the penetrating chill of a wintry dawn crept in at the windows McCarty sat tirelessly at his task. With the aid of the magnifying glass he studied a single sheet of paper before him upon which appeared to the casual eye merely the signature of Victor Marchal. The fruit of his examination was a series of strange and seemingly incomprehensible hieroglyphics which he painstakingly noted down. Then turning to the machine he touched a key here and there, erasing and altering the result in conformity with his notes. The typed sheet spun out from the roller at last and as he read the message which he had evolved an expression of grim joy stole over his face.

Despite his sleepless night he was up betimes and nine o'clock found him once more at Headquarters.

"Mac, you old rascal, where have you been?" the Inspector greeted him with obvious relief and pleasure. "I don't mind telling you that I'm stumped; the Jarvis case is one too many for me!"

"Is it, now?" McCarty asked solicitously. "How did your man make out in New Orleans?"

"He drew a blank!" The Inspector smote his desk in exasperation. "One of the best boys we have in the department, too. He interviewed everyone who was in a position to know anything about Evelyn Beaudet or her family; the Mother Superior of the convent where she was educated, the attorneys who settled her guardian's estate, old business associates of her father, friends of her mother and several people who came in touch with the girl herself socially before her marriage. There isn't the slightest evidence of any secret connected with her, and yet we know she was paying blackmail!"

"And the female operative you've had working among her acquaintances here?" McCarty probed. "Did she find out anything?"

"Nothing whatever. I've even given your theory a try-out but old Norwood claims that the wallet is only mislaid and I can't find any trace of the woman who sold it to him. She represented herself as a stewardess on the Hoyos yacht and I'm having the original one looked up, but she seems to have dropped completely out of sight."

"I saw Mr. Norwood on Saturday night," volunteered McCarty. "He don't seem much interested in the proceedings since Captain Marchal is gone. I don't suppose, sir, that there've been any new developments in that case? It's settled the poor lad killed himself?"

"Of course he did; there has never been a doubt of

that from the first," declared the Inspector. "One shot might have been fired from the pistol long ago, or it may not have been fully loaded."

"Then you didn't find where the other bullet went?" McCarty queried.

"No, and it was a waste of time looking. Before you appeared on the scene I had picked up the ejected shell where it lay right at the feet of the body but no other shell was found; that in itself would prove that only one shot was fired there. He killed himself, all right, and Terhune's a happy man that he solved the murder to suit himself, but I won't accept his solution until every other possibility fails."

"You're thinking, then, there's a chance he may be right?"

"Damn it, man, I don't know what to think!" the Inspector cried. "It is more than two weeks since the woman was done to death and I'm no nearer the truth than when I started. You know what the department is, Mac. There are plenty waiting for my head to fall, and I'm not getting any younger! I can't afford to lay down on this. The papers are putting up a howl as it is over the delay in nailing someone for the crime; they're not particular who, but they need the copy. Besides that, the Jarvises are too prominent and the case itself had too many sensational details for the public to lose interest in it and let other things crowd it out of mind until some explanation is made. The Commissioner gave me a pretty broad hint the other day that it was time to show results and you know what that means. If I don't make good on this I'm a dead one!"

"You'll make good on it, sir!" McCarty burst out, the last trace of his resentment gone before the look of despair on his former superior's face. "I was going to spring it on you to get even with you for giving me the laugh the

other day, but after all it's up to the department to pull it off."

"Mac!" The Inspector jumped to his feet, his worn face brightening with an almost incredulous hope. "What do you mean? You haven't found the man!"

"I'm thinking he'll call at my rooms this night," McCarty replied, his face sobering. "I dropped in to ask you, would you come, sir, and bring Martin and Yost with you. Unless I ball the whole thing up there'll be work for them to do later on, but I'd like them there ahead of any of the others."

"What others?" demanded the Inspector. "Mac, for God's sake if you've got actual proof of the murder's identity and know where he is, tell me now and don't take fool chances!"

"Excuse me, sir!" McCarty's jaw set in a manner the other recognized. "I'm not on the force, if you mind, but only a private party that's butted into the case and I'll tell what I've done in my own way or not at all. I've been in the gallery at more than one of Terhune's little shows and now I'm going to give a séance of my own. Besides you and him I'll have Norwood and young Jarvis; Mr. Vivaseur can come too, if he likes, since he's taken an interest in the case and 'twill do no harm if Denny sits in a corner. There'll be a lady present, too, to keep Martin and Yost company in the back room until they're wanted. 'Tis too bad that Captain Marchal can't come back for the one evening, but he's done the next best thing; he's left us a signed statement of the truth."

"A signed statement!" the Inspector repeated. "Where did you get it?"

"You let me have it yourself, sir," McCarty grinned. "But I'll tell you no more now."

"Look here!" exclaimed the Inspector. "Except for the woman, whoever she is, and Martin and Yost, you've

only named the people who were present at Terhune's experiment two weeks ago. You can't mean that one of them murdered Mrs. Jarvis?"

"It is likely?" McCarty snorted. "I want them all there, though, when the blackguard that did it shows himself. You'll come, sir?"

"Mac, I don't know whether to believe you or not, but you've got me where you want me," the Inspector laughed somewhat uncertainly. "If you won't speak now, you won't, and I'll have to trust you. I'll be there with Martin and Yost."

"At eight then, sir, and see that they're heeled." McCarty picked up his hat. "I don't expect any rough stuff, but you never can tell. Good-by, sir."

Leaving Headquarters he telephoned to Wade Terhune tendering an invitation to his séance that evening, and thoroughly enjoyed the amused and skeptical tone of the great man's acceptance and promise to bring his client. Next he journeyed across town to the private detective agency of one James B. Shane, whom he familiarly addressed as "Jim" and with whom he was in close consultation for more than an hour. One o'clock found him consuming pie and coffee at a nearby lunch counter, after which repast he presented himself at the Norwood house.

"Uncle Cal has gone with Oliver out to Mrs. Jarvis' grave." Joan explained as she greeted McCarty in the drawing-room. "We were both so sorry not to have seen you on Saturday night; weren't we, Eric?"

She appealed to the Englishman who exclaimed as he shook hands.

"Rather! We couldn't imagine what had become of you last week, but we hoped you were working on the investigation. I say, were you?"

"A part of the time," McCarty responded. "I've not

given up hope yet, but I can't see my way to going on with it much further alone. I thought that maybe if we all got together and talked it over—Terhune and Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Norwood and the Inspector—and pieced out what each of us knew or thought we knew, we might get something fresh to start on. The rest have agreed to come to my rooms to-night at half-past eight and I called to see if Mr. Norwood would mind being there, too."

"Of course Uncle Cal will come." Joan's face had fallen. "But haven't you any news for me, Mr. McCarty? Oh, I did so hope that you would be able to discover the truth!"

McCarty flushed deeply.

"I tried, miss," he said simply.

"I say, mayn't I come, too?" Vivaseur asked impulsively. "I know I'm a rank outsider but I've been doing a lot of thinking on the subject and I've an idea or two which may be worth something. If I'm not intruding——"

"Sure! Come if you like," McCarty said cordially. "You and Miss Norwood gave me some good tips before and I'm thinking the Inspector is open now to suggestions from any quarter."

"I suppose I mustn't invite myself?" Joan pouted. "I think you might have held your conference here, Mr. McCarty, and permitted me to be present!"

"I'm afraid that the Inspector——" McCarty began somewhat doubtfully and Vivaseur came to the rescue.

"Not at a council of war, Joan dear; it isn't done," he said lightly. "I'll come back with your uncle to-night if it is not too late and tell you all about it. That will be best."

"Then that's settled." McCarty rose. "At half-past eight, Mr. Vivaseur."

Yet another call remained to be paid before he could return to his rooms and prepare for what the evening would

bring forth. He betook himself to the fire-house where Dennis had returned to his duty and the mask which he had worn all day slipped from him.

"It's done, Denny!" he cried gleefully. "It's all over but the shouting!"

"Is it the murderer you mean!" Dennis spoke in an awestruck whisper. "You've got him, Mac?"

"You mind Jim Shane, that was roundsman in my precinct when I was on my first beat?" McCarty ignored the question. "Well, he's running a private-detective bureau now and on the Thursday before we started for New Orleans I put him to work on a little job for me that has turned the trick!"

"Before we went to New Orleans!" exclaimed Dennis. "You knew then who the fellow was that murdered Mrs. Jarvis?"

"I knew the truth of it when I stood beside that poor, blind Frenchman's body, God rest him, but I couldn't have proved it, and if I had spoken I'd have been put away for a lunatic," McCarty responded gravely. "Instead of being like most cases, where you hold a million loose threads and don't know where they lead to, I had the answer but not the way to connect it up. Are you on day or night duty now?"

"Day," Dennis responded eagerly. "My nights are my own and if there's anything doing this evening I'll be on the job. But who is he, Mac? You've held out on me long enough——"

"You'll know to-night." McCarty regarded him quizzically. "Are you wishful to take part in another little scientific experiment?"

Dennis quailed, then squared his shoulders doggedly.

"I'm not, and well you know it, but if it's going to be *the finish*, you can count me in. What is it you are going

to do now, Mac? Hand Terhune all the credit, like you did in that other case last year?"

"Not this time," McCarty smiled. "I'm holding this séance myself in my own rooms at half-past eight, and there'll be no dinky little machines to take records of every breath you draw."

"'Séance'!" Dennis shivered. "Isn't that what they call it when some medium throws a fit and brings back the spirits of the dead?"

"It is, and that's what I'm going to do." McCarty paused, and then added: "Not throw a fit, I don't mean, but it's a spirit I'm going to bring back from the dead all right; a spirit as evil and black as the devil himself, Denny, with more than one murder on the vile soul of him! 'Twas you yourself first put me on his track, though little you knew it, and to-night we'll resurrect him."

Dennis crossed himself fervently.

"I always said you'd get whoever you were after, if you had to go to the next world to find him, but I never thought to see you do it," he said. "Spooks or no, I'll be there, Mac, with bells on!"

CHAPTER XXII

McCARTY'S SÉANCE

THE bachelor quarters over the antique shop presented a strange and unwonted aspect that evening. The sooty hearth had been scrubbed until it shone, cigar boxes, stray matches, newspapers and the usual litter to be found in the wake of the undomesticated male had miraculously disappeared and an unnatural and self-conscious state of cleanliness and order prevailed.

McCarty, too, seemed abnormally solemn as he greeted Inspector Druet and ushered his two assistants into the small inner bedroom.

"You'll wait here, boys," he announced. "No smoking, mind, for there'll be a lady present and besides I don't want the rest of them that's coming to know you're here till I give the word, but when I do, look sharp!"

"You've got everything arranged?" the Inspector asked in a hurried undertone.

McCarty nodded.

"There'll be no hitch. I'm only asking one thing of you, sir; don't interrupt me no matter what I say, and for the love of God, don't contradict me! I'll be using your name pretty free, but you'll see in the end that 'twas right and proper I should if you've only the patience to wait for it."

"I'll give you your head, Mac," promised the Inspector. "I wish you would put me wise as to what is coming off,

but I'll have to take your word for it that you know what you're about. Are you sure the man we're after will show up?"

A knock upon the door prevented McCarty's immediate reply and he ushered in a tall woman dressed in black, whose features were all but concealed by a heavy veil.

"Good-evening, ma'am." There was an exaggeration of deference in McCarty's manner as he motioned toward the inner room. "I'll ask you to sit in here, please, with these two gentlemen. You've got it all straight about your part of it?"

He added the last in a lowered tone, and the woman nodded and throwing back her veil revealed a face unknown to the Inspector; a face wherein bold, black eyes snapped resolutely and grim lines about the compressed lips left no doubt as to the stern import of her errand.

Martin and Yost rose respectfully as she entered the inner room, but she ignored their presence and seated herself just beyond the range of vision from the doorway.

"Who is she, Mac?" the Inspector urged. "You'll tell me that much, at least!"

"Whist, now!" McCarty cautioned. "There's someone else coming up the stairs."

The door leading to the hall opened slowly and Dennis Riordan craned his neck through the aperture.

"Is it all right?" he demanded in a sepulchral whisper.

"Sure! Come in, Denny." McCarty bustled forward. "Sit you down over there by the window and mind you don't let a peep out of you, no matter what happens."

"But where is she?" Dennis gazed about him in bewilderment. "I could have sworn I saw a woman coming in here; a woman with a long, black veil!"

"You'll be seeing more than that before the night's over!" retorted McCarty impatiently.

The arrival of Vivaseur and Calvin Norwood, the former frankly curious, the latter laboring under an agitation which he strove in vain to conceal, precluded further talk, and Dennis subsided. The newcomers were scarcely seated when Wade Terhune accompanied by his client Oliver Jarvis appeared upon the scene.

McCarty had arranged the chairs so that they formed a rough semi-circle facing the bedroom door and now he stepped before it and cleared his throat.

"You all know that I've no longer any regular connection with the police department," he began, "but now and again when Inspector Druet needs me I go back as a special officer on his staff. I've been working on this investigation with him and he wants me to tell you what progress we've made. That's right, isn't it, sir?"

He appealed to the Inspector and the latter nodded speechlessly in confirmation.

"To do that I'll have to go back a good bit and I'll ask you to bear with me, for it's all a part of the story. A matter of eleven years ago, in nineteen-six in a convent away down south on the Mississippi River, there was a young girl of sixteen or thereabouts who fell in love with a man she flirted with over the wall. He was a dark, handsome fellow calling himself Leon Hoguet and he'd come ashore from a grand yacht anchored just off the bank. One night the girl ran away and married him, but he turned out to be a roystering blackguard and deserted her in less than three months."

Oliver Jarvis uttered a sharp exclamation beneath his breath and the others stared, spellbound, but McCarty continued as though unconscious of the impression his opening words had created.

"The girl went back heartbroken to her guardian in New Orleans and he took her in and hid the scandal of it. He

tried unsuccessfully to find the scoundrel but the girl must have known where to reach him, for between then and spring she wrote him at least two letters. The first was just a poor, pitiful cry to him to come back to the little wife he had deserted, but she must have learned something of his true character in the meantime for the second letter threatened that if he had deceived her she would follow him to the ends of the earth, and she kept her word.

“Leon Hoguet had sold his yacht to a wealthy planter and skipped, but up in New York that spring a man named Leonidas Hoyos bought another one and went in for some gay times.”

It was the Inspector's turn to start, but McCarty paid him no heed.

“Now, this Hoyos had appeared first in New York the summer before from nobody knew where, and making a killing in Wall Street he cut quite a swath. During the month that Hoguet was courting the little convent girl Hoyos was absent from the city and for the next three months he showed up only on flying trips but after that he came back for good.

“I don't know how the girl down south found out that Hoyos and Hoguet were the same, but I suspect it was through a discharged valet he'd beaten up; the stewardess on the second yacht, *The Mulette*, heard him swear to get even. Anyhow, one night in May—the twenty-sixth, it was—when *The Mulette* was lying off in the Hudson the girl came on board. Hoyos was evidently expecting to see someone else entirely for when he came into the saloon where he'd directed his guest was to be shown and found out who it was he took good care that none of the crew or the help should get a sight of her face.

“They had high words but no one could hear what was said then. They stayed shut up in the saloon and they never

touched the food that had been laid out for them, but from the empty bottles scattered around Hoyos must have tanked up on enough champagne to float the whole boat. Later, going on toward midnight, the quarrel broke out again louder than before, the girl crying fit to kill herself and the man shouting and swearing like the brute he was.

"The stewardess on board had her own reasons for hating Hoyos and when she heard the girl's sobs she felt sorry for her, and crept up and listened at the door.

"The girl was pleading first to be taken back, and the stewardess said 'twould have moved the heart of a stone, but he just sneered at her and cursed and finally she demanded her rights as his wife. Then he up and told her where she got off, the blackhearted devil! He'd married other women before her, two or three of them under as many different names, and she had no more legal claim on him than a stranger.

"The girl screamed once and then was quiet and the stewardess thought she must have fainted. After a time she heard Hoyos advising the girl in a cold, sneering way to go back where she came from and not stir up a scandal that would only bring disgrace on herself. All of a sudden he stopped in the middle of a sentence, there was a scuffle and the crack of a revolver.

"The stewardess near fainted, herself, outside the door but the next thing she heard a kind of a choking cry from Hoyos and two heavy splashes in the water."

He paused as Oliver Jarvis with a groan buried his face in his hands. Norwood clutched the arms of his chair and even Vivaseur's ruddy face had paled slightly, while a frown of discomfiture had gathered on Wade Terhune's brow.

"If you remember the Hoyos case you all know what happened; how weeks later a mutilated body was fished out of the river and identified as Hoyos' through his clothes and

the jewelry with his initials on it. The girl was supposed to have been drowned for no trace was found of her and no one knew who she was.

"Because she hated Hoyos so and sympathized with the girl, the stewardess never told what she'd overheard and right after the shooting she remembered a wallet with a couple of letters in it that was in a desk in his cabin. She'd taken a peep at them and was afraid they might help in the girl's conviction if she was caught, so before the police boat came she took the wallet and hid it among her things.

"The girl wasn't drowned, however; she got safe ashore and although the Inspector hasn't been able to prove it yet, he's got an idea how it happened, for it is on the records in Hoboken that about that time a barge captain was arrested trying to dispose of a ruby ring worth thousands. He swore that it had been given to his wife by an old woman, richly dressed, that they pulled out of the river on the night of June first and that in return they provided her with dry clothes and money for a railway journey. The police couldn't prove him a liar for he and his wife and the crew had the description of the old lady down so pat they never suspected 'twas the girl from *The Mulette* that was being shielded, nor that the date of the rescue had been changed.

"She got back to New Orleans and after a terrible, long sickness she shut herself up in her guardian's house like a hermit for a matter of two or three years. But she was young and the horror of it wore off and after a while she began to care for somebody else, a rich New Yorker that was down there on a visit. To be fair to her, she wanted to tell him the truth but her guardian forbade it—she'd sworn to him that Hoguet was dead but told him no more—and she married the Northerner without saying a word of the past.

"You all know who I'm talking about, but I'll have to

use names now to keep from balling up the story, though I don't like to. Last Christmas Mrs. Jarvis received a gift of a big cake with 'Noel' on it in sugar; she didn't know who sent it but she nearly passed away, for she knew that someone from out of the past had spotted her and her secret would never be safe again. Three months afterwards she received an unsigned note made by spelling out words in macaroni letters pasted on paper, saying: 'All is known. Pay or I tell. First warning.'

"She got twenty thousand of her own money from her husband and waited, and around the beginning of the last week in May she got another note that told her to put five thousand dollars under the rose bush in the yard on the night of the twenty-sixth, calling attention to the date. It was the anniversary of that night on *The Murette*. I guess she must have done it, for two weeks later she got the third and last of the macaroni warnings. It ordered her to put a thousand dollars under the bush on the twenty-sixth of each month or everything would be told.

"I don't know—I mean the Inspector hasn't found out yet—how it came about, but the blackmailing must have stopped along in October for only nine thousand is gone out of the twenty, and Mrs. Jarvis planning to go abroad looks as though she thought herself out of danger."

McCarty paused again, but not a sound broke the tense stillness of the listening group, and after a moment he went on in a change of tone:

"I've got to go back now to the stewardess. She had kept the wallet with those letters in it all these years; in fact, it had been in a storage warehouse in a trunk with a lot of other old stuff belonging to her, and she'd almost forgotten that she had them until about a month ago. Then she came across them just when she was out of a job and in

desperate straits for money. She had heard of Mr. Norwood and his museum, and that he paid big prices for relics of crime, and the idea came to her to sell him the letters. She didn't think that after so many years had passed the identity of the young girl could be proved from them, and she'd not be hurting anybody.

"Mr. Norwood bought them from her three days before the murder and told all about them at the dinner at Mr. Jarvis' house on Wednesday night. Mrs. Jarvis was near crazy, for she knew that at any time Mr. Norwood might discover by accident that they were in her handwriting and it would be all up with her. She made up her mind that she'd have to get those letters and on the Friday afternoon she got rid of all her servants, put on the little dark dress with the veil around her head, and started out through the yards for the museum. She would have a clear field, for she had persuaded Mr. Norwood to visit his friend the professor and he'd told her the butler would be out. I guess she didn't figure much on Captain Marchal disturbing her, on account of his blindness, and the cook and housemaid wouldn't see her, with the kitchen shades drawn and the lights turned on.

"There was no way Mrs. Jarvis could get into the museum except by climbing the ladder and forcing one of the windows, and she remembered that Mr. Norwood was a shark—begging his pardon!—on finger prints, so she decided to take a pair of her husband's old motor gloves with her and put them on. In her hurry, however, she only grabbed up one and that she dropped on the ladder. She knew where Mr. Norwood had likely put the wallet, in the tall cabinet where he kept most of his papers and documents relating to crime.

"She got in the museum, all right, and it's my belief

that she had the wallet in her hands when she heard someone at the door, and turned to come face to face with the man she thought had died by her hand ten years before; Leonidas Hoyos himself, in the flesh!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BETRAYING VOICE

“**G**REAT God!” Oliver Jarvis sprang to his feet. “Where is he? Have you got him? Take me to him, I say——”

“Easy now, Mr. Jarvis! There’s more you’ve got to hear first,” McCarty remonstrated. “We haven’t got him yet but we will soon, don’t fear! You’ll only have to have a little more patience.”

“Really, McCarty, your self-confidence is intended to be highly reassuring, no doubt,” drawled Terhune, “but I fear that my client will have to exercise more than a little patience before your laudatory ambition is achieved, and we will have to hear a few more tangible facts before we can share your enthusiasm.”

“You’ll hear them!” McCarty promised grimly. “When I sat in the dark in your consulting room, Mr. Terhune, with a tennis ball on a wire squeezed in my hand and your little Fourth of July illumination inside the clock registering the sweat of me ’twas a fine little flight of fancy I listened to, if you remember with never a complaint. I’ve no phonographs here to play for you nor borrowed skeletons to rattle, nor yet an assistant to prance up and down and work the back-stage effects, but I’ll give you plain, straightforward facts enough before I’m through, so sit tight, sir! You’ve had your little show but this is the Inspector’s and mine. I’m going to prove that ’twas Hoyos himself that faced Mrs. Jarvis there.”

"Can—can this be true?" Calvin Norwood's shaking lips could scarcely frame the words. "But how did he get in the museum?"

"I'm coming to that," responded McCarty. "We haven't found out yet how he got out of the river years ago nor where the body came from that was dressed in his clothes and with his jewelry and all, but the Inspector can prove that Hoyos found it mighty convenient to disappear just then and start all over again; not only on account of the girl but because his luck had gone against him in Wall Street and he'd forged some big checks to cover his losses. We're still working on his record during the past ten years but we know that he's traveled under different names and been in a lot of shady transactions. It's a safe bet that he didn't know the little convent girl he'd tricked into marriage was an heiress or he would have stuck to her till he'd got her fortune away from her. He must have been a surprised man when somehow, a year ago, he found out that she had become the wealthy and prominent Mrs. Oliver Jarvis.

"He sent her the cake in order to get the word 'Noel' to her notice in such a fashion that no one except her would guess what it meant and to pave the way for the blackmail later."

Wade Terhune laughed sneeringly.

"He evidently did not count upon your phenomenal guessing powers, my dear McCarty! To the merely scientific and I may add uninspired mind it would seem a far cry from Leonidas Hoyos to a frosted Christmas cake, but I have no doubt that you can supply the connection?"

McCarty's face reddened at the taunting tone, but he replied quietly.

"Perhaps I can, sir. You've heard, I dare say, of nicknames, and the like. You'd hardly think, perhaps, that a man like Hoyos would be called pet names——"

"What utter rot!" Terhune's coolness was deserting him. "It is only a certain type of man whose personality invites nicknames and your Hoyos is not of that breed. Are you trying to show that the man was called 'Noel'?"

"Not trying to, Mr. Terhune; I *am* showing it." McCarty drew himself up. "Now, if you'd been saddled with a name like 'Leonidas' it stands to reason that your friends wouldn't be twisting their tongues over it except on special occasions. They'd be cutting it short and calling you 'Leon,' most likely. Supposing the girl that loved you found out by accident that those four letters turned backwards spelt 'Noel,' which means Christmas, and decided for a reason to call you that, 'twould not be such a far cry, after all."

"Preposterous!" Terhune exclaimed. "That is the most ridiculous, far-fetched thing you've tried to insult our intelligence with to-night. You surely cannot expect us to accept it!"

"'Far-fetched' is right." McCarty smiled. "For it's from New Orleans I fetched it, sir, from the lady who was Evelyn Beaudet's best friend when they were girls together at the convent."

"Loretta Sawtelle!" exclaimed Oliver Jarvis.

"The same, sir. She'd helped the elopement along and 'twas she told me how the pet name of 'Noel' came about. When the girl he married found that his name spelled a word meaning 'Christmas' she called him that because Christmas was also her birthday; and a fine birthday present she got in him, but no matter!

"You see, when he sent her the cake last year, the whole point was that she must still think he was dead and that she had killed him and somebody else who knew was threatening to squeal on her for murder. It worked, too, only along about October he must have found bigger game and decided to let up on blackmailing her; maybe he put a message in

macaroni paste under the bush telling her so, but that's only another guess, Mr. Terhune. Anyway, if he learned that she was planning to go abroad he must have been just as well pleased to get her out of the way, for the new scheme he had in mind would have brought him in touch with her world.

"Those macaroni-paste letters were masterpieces, at that, for they took in the whole alphabet from 'a' to 'z'. He was thorough, that Hoyos, I'll say that for him! Thorough, but in one thing just an hour too late! However, I'm coming to that.

"He quit blackmailing her, and then he, too, heard about those letters being still in existence and that Mr. Norwood had bought them for his collection. He wanted to get them as badly as Mrs. Jarvis did, for they would be absolute proof to hold over her head in case he ever needed in the future to use his power over her. He managed to get possession of a key to the Norwood house but the door to the museum itself he opened with a spider.

"What happened when the two of them met there we don't have to guess entirely, for unknown to either of them at the time there was a witness, a third party who listened in on the scene long enough to hear about the secret Mrs. Jarvis had kept all those years. He crept away kind of stunned with the news, his only thought being to keep her from ever suspecting that he knew. Then that night her murdered body was discovered and he was nearly out of his head with self-reproach, thinking how he might have prevented her death if only he hadn't gone away and left them there in the museum together. He had one clue to the man; the sound of his voice which was forever ringing in his ears, and all that next week he kept thinking he heard again and blaming his brain for the tricks it was playing

McCarty paused as his glance traveled along the semi-circle of tense, set faces. Only the sound of a sharply drawn breath broke the stillness until he spoke again with deep solemnity.

"Captain Marchal did not kill himself. He was murdered, shot down in cold blood by the same hand that had strangled Mrs. Jarvis."

With his last word the tension which had held the others in leash snapped like a tautly strung wire and instantly the room was in confusion. Calvin Norwood, Oliver Jarvis and Wade Terhune had all three sprung to their feet and the former cried excitedly:

"I knew it! I knew Victor was neither insane nor a coward! He'd made too gallant a record in the war, too brave a fight afterward to go under and take his own life just because a whippersnapper of a detective tried to fasten the responsibility for the crime on him rather than admit his own failure to find the real murderer!"

He turned and glared with savage exultation upon Wade Terhune, who ignored him in cold disdain and advanced sneeringly to McCarty.

"I've listened very patiently to your ingenious though highly fanciful tale, my dear McCarty, but this is a little too much! Marchal was a suicide; the powder marks about the wound alone showed that, for the position of the furniture in the room precluded the possibility of anyone having approached him closely enough to have fired the shot."

McCarty smiled grimly.

"That's just what the murderer figured on making everyone believe, Mr. Terhune, and he took you in as well as the rest. 'Twas a clever stunt he pulled, but he didn't do it quite in time."

The shaft went home and the criminalist turned angrily upon Inspector Druet, who sat apart, his face a study.

"Inspector, is McCarty speaking by your authority? Do you, too, hold to this ridiculous assertion?"

For a moment the Inspector's eyes searched his self-constituted spokesman's face and what he read there evidently satisfied him, for he replied with a ring of finality in his tones:

"I do. Mac knows what he's about, Mr. Terhune; just give him the floor, please."

The others subsided and McCarty explained:

"You see, the poor young lad betrayed himself; he showed his suspicions too plainly before he was convinced enough to act on them and Hoyos—we'll call him that still, though now I could put another name to him—got to him there in the library when he was all alone. There was a struggle and Marchal managed to get the drawer of the desk open and pull out his pistol to defend himself with but Hoyos wrested it out of his hand. Marchal must have broke away from his grasp then and ran from him, for when Hoyos shot him *the first time* 'twas from a distance of several feet. He fell and then the bright idea came to Hoyos.

"He knew that everyone else in the house was out and he'd have all the time in the world to do what he wanted to. He extracted the second cartridge shell from the pistol and picking up this pair of shears from the table, he cut off the top of the shell with the blades of it and took out the bullet. Then he clamped the two pieces of the cartridge together again, using the heavy bronze handles of the shears like a pair of pincers, and putting it back in the pistol he went up close to where Marchal was lying and fired a second shot—a blank one—directly into the wound, scattering the powder all over it.

"He put the empty shell of one cartridge at the feet of the corpse, dropped the pistol by his hand, pocketed the

other shell and the second bullet, and pulled the furniture around like a barricade to make people think exactly what they did; then he went away greatly pleased with himself and the job, I've no doubt, but he'd forgot just three things. There's not much blood comes from a direct heart wound and he was too long about fixing up that blank cartridge; the sprinkling of powder from the second shot stayed on top of the bloodstains, almost dry, as the Inspector and I found later. We found something else, too; the marks of lead on the blades of the shears where he'd cut the cartridge and the grains of powder he'd let fall on the polished top of the library table."

Amid a silence as profound as before the recent interruption, McCarty handed the shears to the dazed Inspector and produced the envelope from which he shook out upon his palm the particles of powder and held them for all to see.

"He thought he'd rid himself of the last danger of discovery and all was plain sailing ahead of him," McCarty continued, carefully dusting the powder back into the envelope and tendering it also to the Inspector, "but he'd come on Marchal just an hour too late.

"There's the powder and the shears to prove it, and here I've something else that caps it all!

"They say that people who lose their eyesight get sharper in other ways, that they can sense things quicker than them that can see. Certain it is that Marchal not only suspected the owner of the voice that was so like the one he had heard in the museum, but he got it that the fellow was afraid he knew, somehow, and a warning came to him that he'd be done to death the same as Mrs. Jarvis was. Anyhow, that Wednesday afternoon he made up his mind to write out a statement of what he'd heard and suspected in case anything happened to him and when he found himself all alone in the house I think a kind of a hunch came to

him, what they call a premonition. He was in deadly fear for his own life from that minute, not that he was afraid of death but that it would come on him before he had a chance to denounce the murderer of Mrs. Jarvis.

"He'd followed some of them to the door, maybe, and then made a rush for his typewriter and in blundering around, knocked it off the table. The crash of it was the last straw to his frazzled nerves and a kind of a panic seized him, a frenzied determination to get that statement written as if every minute was going to be his last. He couldn't lift the typewriter because of an injury to his arm and shoulder which he got in the war, but he grabbed a sheet of paper and squatted down on the floor and wrote out his message. Then he found a pen, signed it, and put it in the desk where 'twould be the first thing seen when the drawer was opened. He never knew that the ribbon on the typewriter was broken by the fall and that no writing appeared on the papers at all but just his signature.

"There was something else in that drawer too; a photograph of Mrs. Jarvis' finger-print records, that she'd let Mr. Norwood take long ago, and that Marchal had got out of the museum and hid the morning after the murder, to shield her if she'd left any marks and anyone suspected what had brought her there.

"I've said there was nothing on that sheet of paper except his signature, and that's all that did show to the naked eye. Now I've turned up my nose at microscopes and such as playthings for the amateur and little I thought I'd ever come to one, myself, the sight that God gave me being plenty for my needs in the past, thanks be! But when the Inspector and I gave that paper the once-over we found little dents in it, and put it under a magnifying glass. Then we saw that it had been put through the typewriter and knowing *the ink* ribbon of it had been broken when it crashed to the

floor we put two and two together. The dents on the paper had been made by the keys striking directly on it instead of against the ribbon that wasn't there. I borrowed the typewriter from Mr. Norwood and we tested it, with and without the ribbon, till we'd doped out the message. Here it is, and I'm going to read you the notes we made from it."

The stillness was broken now by a wordless stir which ran around the semicircle as McCarty took from his pocket the folded blank sheet and another covered with laboriously scrawled writing. The first he passed to Inspector Druet, while from the second he read:

"I know who killed Madame Jarvis. He knows that I know and he will kill me also. I heard them there in the museum and the voice of her murderer is the voice of him who calls himself Eric Vivaseur!"

"It's a lie!" Vivaseur's voice rose to a snarling scream as he leaped from his chair, his once stolid, good-natured face distorted to a mask of demoniac fury. "That poor, crazed fool never wrote those words! You've made it up between you, damn you, to get up a case! It's a lie! A lie!"

He checked himself suddenly as though a hand had been laid across his writhing lips, and with eyes starting from their sockets he crumpled back into his chair.

A tall, dark woman robed in black had appeared in the door leading to the inner room. Her face was as white as chalk but her tones were firm and steady as she spoke:

"I'm Kate Stricker. I was stewardess on *The Muette* and I sold the letters to Mr. Norwood." Slowly, inexorably she raised her arm and pointed to the cowering, cringing figure before her. "Leon Hoyos' hair was black then and he was younger by ten years, but that is the man!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES

IT was a soft, still night in early June and Dennis and McCarty sat side by side with their chairs tilted comfortably back against the wall of the firehouse, smoking in silence.

Their conversation had been desultory and flagging for their thoughts were busied with a subject neither of them broached. The distant whine of a hand-organ, the honk of motor cars, voices of children and the grating syncopation of a phonograph from an open window across the way alike fell on deaf ears.

At length Dennis took the plunge.

"I see by the papers that Hoyos went to the chair this morning."

McCarty nodded solemnly.

"He got his, and if ever a man deserved the trip through the little green door, he did."

"There's a hint that he made a confession at the last," Dennis observed.

"I would not put it past him." McCarty spoke with all the policeman's contempt for a squealer. "The coward that would strangle a woman and shoot a blind man would be apt to spill his soul when the end came."

"True for you." Dennis sucked at his pipe. "You told me once—it was the night when you showed him up—that 'twas me first put you on the track of him. How did I?"

A slow grin widened McCarty's lips.

"When I first told you about Miss Joan bringing him home you said he had a name like a dime novel. It did seem too high-sounding to be the real thing. You gave me another tip, too, later on. When I described how I doped it out that Mrs. Jarvis was not killed in her own home but went across to the Jarvis house alive and well, you said that she sneaked over 'like a thief.' And that's just what she had done, Denny, for she went to steal that wallet with the letters."

"What became of it anyway?" Dennis asked.

"'Twas found in Vivaseur's rooms at the hotel; Hoyos', I mean."

"Well, there's one thing!" Dennis knocked the ashes from his pipe and ground out the live embers with a capacious boot. "Your séance beat anything Terhune ever got up, with all his little machines! Man, 'twas grand when that Stricker woman stood up in the doorway and called Hoyos out of his name! But I don't see how you ever got her to come across with the admission that she'd sold the letters."

"She knew 'twould come out anyway and it was satisfaction to the soul of her to denounce him. When I had that first talk with her on the pier at Atlantic City I knew if I could once convince her that he was alive and she could help punish him for a crime she would talk, quick enough. She's a good, strong hater, that Kate!"

"Who's this coming?" Dennis squinted down the street, where from the corner a tall figure was approaching with a firm, familiar tread.

"'Tis the Inspector, no less!" McCarty rose eagerly. "Good-evening to you, sir! What brings you walking our beat?"

"I was passing by and stopped in at your rooms." Inspector Druet smiled. "When you weren't there I knew where I would find you! 'Evening, Riordan. Don't disturb yourself."

"There's another chair just inside the door." Dennis swung it out with a long arm. "There! We was just talking about the Hoyos case, sir, seeing as he was electrocuted this morning. Was it true that he made a confession before they turned on the juice?"

"Yes. We have it down at Headquarters now. He told a good bit about his life but a lot of it is colored to put him in as good a light as possible. There are parts that ring true, however. His father was a baker in Vienna, his mother a seamstress from Greece."

"That accounts for the cake, the macaroni paste and the Greek name Leonidas," McCarty nodded. "He flew high from the bakeshop, didn't he?"

"Yes. He was the manager of a gambling casino at a resort on the French coast before he came to this country. He doesn't say much about those early years here or where he got the money to start his Wall Street speculations which enabled him to buy that yacht he had down on the Mississippi. He tells, though, how he found and palmed off that body as his after the affair of *The Murette*; seems quite proud of it as a smart trick. The girl shot him through the shoulder, you know, not seriously and he easily swam ashore. Alongside the railroad which runs by the river he came on the body of a trackwalker who had evidently just been hit by a train. He walked on—it was near the dawn—when he came to a little shanty with overalls and underwear flapping on a line in the yard. That gave him an idea and he took what he needed, then went back and stripping the body of the trackwalker, dressed it in his own things even to the jewelry and dumped it into the river. He tied a stone to the dead man's clothes—I guess he'd been pretty badly mussed up by the train—and dropped them in after him. Then he dressed himself in what he had taken from the line and started off barefoot with what money

he'd thought it prudent to keep out of the roll the dead man was floating down stream with.

"He is silent about what happened to him during the next ten years and how he discovered the girl again in Mrs. Jarvis, while about the blackmailing he merely says that we doped it out right. He claims that he really loved Miss Norwood and meant to marry her honestly as his first and legal wife was dead, but that is merely a play to the gallery. How did you find out so much about his actions after he became Vivaseur, Mac?"

"Through Jim Shane, that used to be on the force, too. He's running a private-detective agency now and I put him on the job before ever we started for New Orleans. It was clever of Hoyos to fix up that grand English name and accent and family tree for himself and sport around on the money he blackmailed Mrs. Jarvis out of with that swell Long Island bunch where Miss Norwood was visiting." McCarty paused and his face clouded. "That was almost the dirtiest part of the whole job I had to do; to kill that girl's faith and bring misery to her."

"It's not half the misery she'd have had if she'd married him," Dennis remarked.

"I know. She told me after that he had wanted her to elope with him. That was because he didn't dare face Mrs. Jarvis, you see, until he'd got the girl for himself. She says that he suddenly changed his mind the very day she brought him back and introduced him to her uncle; and good reason, too. He'd gone back to town over night and murdered the woman who might have stood in his way so he'd nothing to fear except a too curious search of his record, and old Norwood was not the man for that." McCarty paused to light a fresh cigar from the stump of the old one, and continued: "When Norwood wrote his niece about buying the Hoyos letters she told Vivaseur, of course, and he

determined to get them. He stole her latch-key from her so that he could get in the house and he must have been watching it closely that Friday afternoon to have seen Norwood go out and figured that the coast was clear. I'll bet he was a surprised man the day to walk into the museum and find Mrs. Jarvis waiting for him!"

The Inspector nodded.

"He only killed her when he was convinced that she would spoil his game with Miss Norwood," he said. "If it hadn't been for you, Mac, he would have gotten off scot free, for I was on the wrong track entirely. I was a stubborn fool not to listen to you in the first place, and I don't mind admitting it before Riordan here. I never felt so low-down in my life as when I had to sit there in your rooms with Terhune and that crowd and hear you give me the credit for what you had pulled off all alone while I laughed at you! You had your revenge that night and you saved my official head. I've not forgotten it."

"Well, sir, you had your notion of the case and I had mine," McCarty said simply. "I was just as stubborn as you, and 'twas just by accident that my notion happened to be the lucky one. It's only strange, with all the clues we had, that we didn't hit on the truth sooner."

"There were a lot of minor indications, of course," the Inspector admitted. "But there were just seven real clues. Did that ever strike you?"

"Seven?" McCarty looked up. "You mean that cake marked 'Noel,' the three warnings in macaroni paste, the two poor bits of notes in the wallet and the statement of Captain Marchal? Sure, there were more clues than that, sir; there were twenty-six."

"Twenty-six clues!" the Inspector echoed. "What are you getting at, Mac? I never heard of the others."

McCarty laughed.

“Indeed, and you did! They were the first things ever you learned in your life and the clues you mention are all part of them!” Then as Inspector Druet still looked his mystification McCarty explained naively: “All seven of the clues were made up of them, sir—the letters of the whole damned alphabet!”

THE END

If you have enjoyed reading this book we suggest that you read “The Clue in the Air” by the same author. In it you will again meet McCarty, Tim and Terhune. Critics, everywhere, have agreed that “The Clue in the Air” is one of the best detective stories of all time.



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